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SECRETARIAT

*“Bringing together organisations
in the UK to protect and enhance
wildlife and landscape, and to
further the quiet enjoyment and
appreciation of the countryside.”*



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Q1 Report January – March 2004

Letter from the Chair...

Dear Members,

The first quarter of 2004 has seen some interesting developments and some real successes for Link members.

The Link working groups and task forces have continued to work on our joint priorities. A new task force working on motorised access in the countryside has been established as agreed in Link's 2004 plan.

On the water front, so to speak, there was considerable pressure from other interests to keep future water price rises lower and to slash the environment programme, even though these cuts would have reduced the increase in consumers' bills by very little. Link Water Task Force members responded by writing collectively to Tony Blair, the letter was signed by 14 CEOs and published in *The Independent*. We were pleased that the Government announced in March that there will be sufficient investment by water companies in environmental improvements.

Link has also been continuing to react to external developments. For example Bovine TB is being addressed by a sub-group of the Farming WG through the development of a joint statement for submission to the EFRA Select Committee Inquiry considering solutions to the problem of Bovine TB.

Defra's modernisation review has been challenging for us all. Link meetings and papers have, I believe, helped to keep us all thinking about the review, and the outcomes which we would all desire from Government and its agencies in the future.

This has been my first three months as the Chair of Link and thank you to all of you who have helped make it an enjoyable, if hectic, time. I am hoping to meet more of the Link members over the coming months and my continued thanks go to the hard working Secretariat without whom none of this would be possible.

Best wishes

Hilary Allison

Working Groups

Farming and Rural Development WG

The announcement on the Single Farm Payment, now known as the Single Payment (SP) was made on 12th February, Secretary of State Margaret Beckett first making the announcement in the house, and then at the conference *The Curry Commission – 2 years on*. The SP will be paid partly on a historic basis and partly area, shifting in increments from 90/10 historic/area in 2005 to a 100% flat rate in 2012. Mrs Beckett also ruled out using the National Envelope. Different payment rates will apply in the Severely Disadvantaged Areas (SDAs). Overall the decision seems to have been well received, except where there were clearly going to be significant reductions in subsidy to some farmers within the SDA. After considerable debate, Mrs Beckett announced a 3 tier system to accommodate the concerns of farmers within the SDA but outside the Moorland line.

Further concerns about the unintentional effects of the SP arose when the draft regulations were published. This has led to concerns that some traditional orchard owners may choose to remove their trees so that they can qualify for the SP. Members of Link continued to work on the Higher Tier Scheme.

Consultation on Cross Compliance and Good Agricultural and Environmental Condition (GAEC)

It was agreed that the Link statement should include our position on soil management plans, 2m margins, in-field trees, traditional orchards, animal welfare (codes of good practice to become one unified code), non-cropped land, landscape features; including ponds (it was noted that linear features in Habitats Directive had not been listed in England's cross compliance – but were in the

Commission documents), and access. It was also suggested that we should ask for 50% of set aside not to be planted with industrial crops. We also agreed to support inspections on a risk-based approach, but not supporting less inspection for farms in assurance schemes because of the commercial interests within assurance scheme operations.

Bovine TB

A Bovine TB subgroup was established to discuss this issue and a meeting of interested Link members was held on 5th April 2004. It was agreed by those at the meeting that Link would issue a statement regarding the most appropriate methods of tackling Bovine TB and the wildlife impacts of control methods.

Meetings

19th Feb – WG meeting

Activity Forecast

- Response to consultation on cross compliance and GAEC
- Link GM statement
- Link Farming blue-sky day 24th June

Land use planning WG

The Planning and Compulsory Purchase Bill left the House of Lords towards the end of March. As expected, a number of amendments had been debated and voted on. Notably, the Government made a concession on the sustainable development clause, which has been strengthened from: *"The person or body must exercise the function with a view to contributing to the achievement of sustainable development"* to *"The person or body must exercise the function with the objective of contributing to the achievement of sustainable development"* (giving slightly less than the Link suggestion of *"The person or body must exercise the*

function with the objective of achieving sustainable development").

PPS1 was released for consultation in February, and the group will meet to discuss a draft response in April.

The Land Use Planning group has agreed in principle to produce guidance for plan-making authorities on the implementation of the changes brought about by the planning bill, which is expected to come into force in July.

Concerns remain over PPS7, in particular the statement that local countryside designations *should not be included*. A Link briefing to government on the issue of the range of local designations is in progress.

Meetings

9th Feb – WG meeting

Activity Forecast

- To write to Planning Minister arguing for the retention of local countryside designations in local plans
- WG meeting on 28th April
- Produce Link response to the consultation on PPS1
- Prepare guidance for regional and local authorities on producing RSSs and LDFs

Minerals subgroup

The Minerals subgroup was delighted to hear that the Aggregates Levy and Sustainability Fund have been taken forward and will continue for a further 3 years. The group will continue to monitor and try to influence uses of the Sustainability Fund. The Minerals group is also preparing to respond to MPS1 when it is released for consultation in the near future.

Working Groups & Task Forces

Meetings

3rd Feb – WG meeting

Activity Forecast

- Response to MPS1 consultation
- Continued monitoring and influence of uses of the Sustainability Fund

PPS9 subgroup

Q1 was a quiet quarter for the PPS9 subgroup which continues to await the release of draft PPS9 for consultation. The group continued to feed in case studies and references to the consultant contracted by English Nature to produce the good practice guidance that will accompany the new PPS.

Activity Forecast

- Liaison with government departments, agencies and allies on the forthcoming draft PPS9 and associated good practice guidance.
- Response to PPS9 consultation.

Wildlife and Trade WG

The Wildlife and Trade working group met with the UK CITES authorities in February, to discuss the forthcoming Animals Committee and Standing Committee meetings, and the thirteenth Conference of the Parties, to be held in Thailand this October.

In particular, Link sought the UK's support for the following:

- The proposal to include the narwhal in the next phase of the Review of Significant Trade; and
- Germany's proposals for the EU to put forward two shark species – porbeagle shark and spiny dogfish – for Appendix II listing at CoP13.

Since the meeting, letters have been sent to the Environment

Minister, Elliot Morley, on both of these issues.

Standing Committee 50 had been suggested as the earliest date at which Parties could agree that the conditions to allow the ivory stockpile sales to go ahead had been met. The UK authorities had been in agreement with Link that the conditions would not have been fulfilled on time for SC50, and possibly even for CoP13. Further proposals to allow one-off sales of stockpiles are expected at CoP13 as well as a proposal for the downlisting of all elephants to Appendix II.

The Animals Committee would consider, among other things, what to recommend for the next phase of the Significant Trade Review. The World Conservation Monitoring Centre has backed the inclusion of the narwhal in this process – narwhals' valuable tusks are exported by Greenland and Canada, but almost no data is available on the level of hunting or the sizes of the populations affected. Link has asked for UK support for the inclusion of the narwhal, both at the meeting in February and through a subsequent letter to Elliot Morley.

The UK is not putting forward any listing proposals for CoP13 for consideration by the EU. However, Link has requested the UK's support for German proposals to list the porbeagle shark and the spiny dogfish on Appendix II. Both of these species are heavily exploited and have suffered major population declines, and stocks are either unmanaged or are managed inadequately. The only other listing proposal which may be put forward by an enlarged EU is thought to be a Slovenian proposal regarding the date mussel.

Link continues to engage with both the UK and the European Commission over issues regarding the lack of transparency in decision making at CITES – in particular by the

EU whose 15 (soon to be 25) countries must all vote in the same way, or abstain, on any proposal. Link is also discussing NGO representation on the UK delegation to CoP13 with the UK authorities.

Meetings

2nd Feb – WG meeting
27th Feb – Meeting with Defra
18th Mar – WG meeting

Activity Forecast

- To discuss the terms for a Link representative at CITES CoP13, Thailand, November 2004
- To meet with the UK CITES authorities on 26th May to discuss the various proposed resolutions and amendments to the appendices
- To meet with Elliot Morley MP, along with Defra and members of the Sustainable Users Network on 24th June

Whales subgroup

Iceland's 'scientific' whaling programme remains a key consideration of the whale working group. The group has recently followed up its letter to companies operating tours to Iceland, to try to gain further support calling on the Icelandic government to abandon its whaling plans.

Another major concern is the proposed Sakhalin II oil and gas development, which threatens the feeding grounds of an endangered grey whale population. Link is urging the Minister to advise against funding of the project by the export credit guarantee department and the European Bank of Reconstruction and Development.

Late in 2003 the whale group wrote to the MOD expressing concerns regarding the deployment of low frequency sonar systems by the UK military, and seeking a public examination of the threats to cetaceans posed by the system. A reply was

Task Forces

received from the Defence Procurement Agency – the company which supplies the system to the UK. This letter failed to allay members' concerns and further correspondence with government on this matter is planned.

On the last day of the quarter, the first meeting of the Whaling Forum since the appointment of Ben Bradshaw MP as the responsible Minister was held. Unfortunately, due to a clash with the vote on the higher education bill, the Minister was unable to join the meeting as planned. However, the NGOs were shepherded through the secret corridors of Nobel House to the Minister's office, where a ten minute audience was used to request a strong UK statement on a number of key issues ahead of IWC56 in July.

Meetings

30th Jan – Whale group meeting
31st Mar – Whaling Forum

Activity Forecast

- To campaign for proper, public investigation of the effects on cetaceans of a sonar system used by the UK.
- To urge the UK government to advise against UK and European funding for offshore oil and gas developments at Sakhalin which threaten a critically endangered grey whale population

Biodiversity TF

Work on the drafting of the manifesto – *Sustaining Biodiversity* – was completed in early February, and the document has now gone into production, with sign up from all four country Links and around twenty member organisations. High profile launches are being planned by WCL and SEL, and the document will be available for distribution at the UK Biodiversity

Partnership meeting, to be held in Cardiff in June.

A Link discussion paper on the delivery of Marine BAPs was considered by the UK Biodiversity Partnership Standing Committee at its March meeting.

In February, the EFRA committee announced a sub-committee inquiry into the condition of SSSIs, to which a number of members submitted written evidence. The RSPB was among the witnesses called to the sub-committee's first evidence session on 22nd March.

Meetings

13th Jan – Biodiversity Manifesto meeting
29th Jan – Task Force meeting

Activity Forecast

- TF meeting 4th May
- To meet Defra's Biodiversity Policy Unit regarding the manifesto on 9th June
- To launch Link Biodiversity Manifesto on 17th June
- To look at favourable conservation status and how to link this to BAP targets for EU species
- To continue to sit on and contribute to various UK biodiversity groups

Marine TF

The Marine Task Force (MTF) continues to develop papers calling for comprehensive marine legislation, and has begun to discuss the campaign more formally with external audiences. The MTF held a very useful and positive meeting with English Nature in March, and plans to meet with Defra in early April.

The EFRA committee inquiry into the marine environment heard evidence from the Environment Minister, Elliot Morley, in early January. A number of MTF members attended the session, and were encouraged by the views the Minister expressed

regarding marine legislation. MTF members will meet the Minister in May to share views on what new legislation should cover.

The Committee published its report on the Marine Environment on 21st March. The report contained recognition of the Government's obligations to act urgently to protect our seas, and some welcome recommendations regarding marine legislation. The government is expected to respond to the report within the next two months.

Further evidence of the recognition by parliamentarians of the need for greater marine protection is provided by EDM171 on protecting the marine environment. Tabled by John Randall, with cross-party support, last December, the EDM has gathered over 280 signatures. The rate of signing has increased recently due to a coordinated mailing, by the sister Links, of MPs in England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland.

Drafting of the final report of this phase of the Review of Marine Nature Conservation has begun. It is intended that this should be presented to Ministers at the start of June.

Meetings

20th Jan – Joint Links Meeting
4th Feb – MTF meeting
1st Mar – Meeting with English Nature
10th Mar – Campaign meeting

Activity Forecast

- 7th April – MTF meeting and meeting with John Roberts, Head of Marine and Waterways Division, Defra
- 28th April – MTF campaign meeting
- 25th May - Publicity event for MPs to mark World Oceans Day
- 26th May – Meeting with Environment Minister, Elliot Morley MP, to discuss the Link Marine Campaign

Task Forces

Bycatch subgroup

A severely weakened, and extremely disappointing, Bycatch Regulation was agreed by EU Fisheries Ministers on 22nd March. The regulation does not require pingers to be deployed by vessels shorter than 12m (excluding a vast proportion of the gill netting fleet). Further, it fails to require observers on boats where pingers are deployed, so that information will not be gathered on their effectiveness or impact (this is seen by many as being worse than a failure to require pingers at all).

Proposed observer schemes for trawl fisheries are felt to be inadequate, and no action to reduce bycatch where it is recorded has been identified. In addition, the implementation dates for all of the regulation's requirements have been pushed back. For example, a driftnet ban in the Baltic Sea will not come into force until 2008 – so the severely threatened harbour porpoise population (some recent estimates suggest only 93 animals may remain) will have driftnets to contend with for years to come.

The report of the EFRA sub-committee inquiry into bycatches of cetaceans was published in January, and called on the government to tighten up its own bycatch response strategy, for example by requiring pingers in inshore as well as offshore waters. The Committee also recommended that emergency measures should be invoked to close down the pelagic trawl fishery for seabass, should bycatch mitigation measures not prove to be effective over the next two years. It remains to be seen whether the government will seek to impose measures stricter than those agreed by the EU in UK waters.

Activity Forecast

- Group members to attend ASCOBANS meeting in Poland
- 10th June - Bycatch working group meeting

Water TF

The Water Task Force were very concerned by rumours in January that the necessary investment in environmental improvements would not be included within Margaret Beckett's guidance to the water companies. Link members responded by writing jointly to Tony Blair and the media, to demonstrate support for the environmental programme and highlighting that England and Wales would, in future, be in breach of EU legislation were the investment not to go ahead. Our campaign was successful, and the guidance issued by Mrs Beckett in March included not only those elements required by law, but some further programmes.

Meetings

26th Feb - TF meeting

Activity Forecast

- Response to consultation on British Waterways
- Diffuse water pollution consultation

MPV TF (4*4)

The inaugural meeting of the Link Task Force on mechanically propelled vehicles (MPV) was held on 4th March. Members exchanged views on the current situation of motorised vehicular access issues and the problems that were occurring within England, in particular in "hotspots" where MPV are causing damage. Members discussed alternative solutions to tackle the problems and agreed that the voluntary restraint

approach had not worked in many situations.

In March, the group submitted a response to the government consultation on the "Use of mechanically propelled vehicles on rights of way". Further work to publicise the agreed position on MPV access was agreed for the next quarter.

Meetings

4th Mar – TF Meeting

Activity Forecast

- Task Force meeting 11th May
- Circulate "user-friendly" version of the consultation response
- Draft Link statement on Making the Best of Byways

Defra's Modernisation Review

Link organised several meetings in the first quarter, to share intelligence and discuss our reactions to developments. The first meeting on 13th January highlighted common concerns and led to a much larger meeting of Link members, Defra officials and leading opinion formers on 30th January. Following the meeting Link developed a paper on the outcomes members wish to see from the review and submitted this to Defra.

Meetings

13th Jan - Link meeting
30th Jan - Meeting with Defra officials, opinion leaders and Link members (45 attendees)

Activity Forecast

- Link meeting 6th April 2004

Sister Links



Northern Ireland Environment Link (NIEL)

NIEL spent much of the first quarter developing their Strategic Plan to assist in obtaining core funding from the Environment and Heritage Service. This has involved numerous meetings of members and the Executive Committee, and a final plan is expected from the consultants in late May.

In addition, NIEL, along with a number of its members and a coalition of NGOs in Northern Ireland, has commissioned a report dealing with environmental governance issues. The report, entitled '*Transparency and Trust*' written by Professor Richard Macrory of University College London was launched on April 1st 2004. Thus far (on May 7) there has been a major consultation seminar about the options presented in the report. The consultation period is expected to last until June.



Wales Environment Link (WEL)

In an effort to meet with every single Assembly Member in Wales, WEL members met with 57 of the 60 members of the Welsh Assembly Government in February. Positive feedback on this exercise from WEL, its members and the members of government shows that it was a worthwhile undertaking. In a reversal of roles WEL's attempt to canvas support from the politicians to place environmental

issues more prominently on the Assembly's agenda seems to be paying off, however time will tell.

WEL consultations on the new Assembly Government's Sustainable Development Action Plan and the Common Agricultural National Reserve, Envelope and Cross Compliance/Good Agricultural and Environmental Condition (GAEC) proposals are underway.

Furthermore, the government has committed to the production of an overarching Environment Strategy for Wales which WEL anticipates with great interest.

Preparations are already underway for this year's centenary Royal Welsh Agricultural Show in July and anyone in the vicinity is welcome to join the other 200,000 visitors!

The Richards Commission, appointed by the First Member of the National Assembly of Wales to review the existing powers and voting system of the Assembly, has finally submitted its report recommending more primary legislative powers and more Assembly Members for Wales.

An awkward moment for the Welsh Assembly Government on the introduction of genetically modified forage maize seems to have been avoided thanks to Bayer CropScience's decision not to commercialise the Chardon LL maize.

In related news, the Welsh Development Agency (WDA) is also about to launch its consultation developed in partnership with the voluntary sector on a "Compact between the Voluntary Sector in Wales and the WDA."



Scottish Environment Link (SEL)

Since the beginning of the year, SEL and its members have made progress in a number of areas.

SEL has successfully launched the *everyone* campaign in time for the European Parliamentary election on June 10, 2004. The campaign encourages people to contact candidate MEP's, go to hustings meetings and of course vote! SEL has identified 12 issues where Europe will affect what happens in Scotland and have prepared briefings on these which can be viewed on their www.everyonecan.org website.

In an effort to encourage Third Party Right of Appeal, SEL has launched consultations in the week of April 2, in advance of anticipated planning legislation in 2005. Through these consultations Link bodies are raising awareness and briefing Members of Scottish Parliament (MSP's).

With reference to Strategic Environmental Assessment, almost 20 of SEL's members signed onto a recent consultation response and they are planning research work and briefings to MSP's and others around expected legislation later on in the year.

In addition, on the issue of Landscape and Wildland, the recently published Link leaflet has called for improved strategic management of Scotland's wild land resource. In March, various LINK bodies submitted a joint response to the Scottish National Heritage consultation on landscape in Scotland.

SEL had requested and has seen evidence of parliamentary reviews of Rural Development

Sister Links

Plan schemes and payment rates as well as a Less Favoured Areas Support Scheme and agri-environment schemes.

SEL has also committed to joint work calling for serious climate action in Scotland as well as ensuring input from Scotland to the UK review of strategy for sustainable development.

There has also been increasing advocacy around the need for a thorough review of the Historic Environment and how it is managed.

An upcoming highlight is the imminent launch of a campaign for better and integrated management of Scotland's marine environment.

News from the WCL Secretariat

Management Committee

The first Management Committee Meeting of 2004 was held on 22nd March. Issues discussed included quarterly accounts, membership subscriptions & donations, the potential for WCL to run an "everyone" style campaign to influence voters within England at the next general election and the new WCL website. In addition, an induction session was held for new members and used as a refresher for existing committee members.

The WCL Management Committee for 2004 are:

Chair: Hilary Allison, The Woodland Trust

Deputy Chair: Gwyn Williams, RSPB

Treasurer: Frank Syrratt, Plantlife Committee:

Emily Richmond, Ramblers' Association

John Everitt, The Wildlife Trusts

Robbie Marsland, IFAW

Chris Butler-Stroud, WDCCS

Other Link news...

A considerable investment in WCL's IT system was made early in the first quarter, with the installation of a new server and upgrades of all workstations. Many thanks for your patience during the somewhat chaotic

changeover period, I'm sure you will be glad to hear all systems are now fully up and running!

Link also launched its new website www.wcl.org.uk complete with private members area. The Secretariat would like to thank John Ward at UCL for his hard work in creating this secure area. If you have forgotten your username and password for the member's area please contact Helen on helen@wcl.org.uk who will be able to reissue these to you.

Link also said a fond goodbye to long-term volunteer Ralph Underhill who has taken up a position as Policy Assistant with the Council for National Parks. Pippa, Annie & Helen all thank Ralph for his hard work during his time with Link, and wish him the very best of luck for the future.

WORKING GROUPS

Farming and Rural Development

Chair: John Cousins, The Wildlife Trusts

Vice Chair: Ian Woodhurst, CPRE

Woodland Subgroup: Chair: Nick Collinson, Woodland Trust

Sec: Pippa Langford
(pippa@wcl.org.uk)

Land Use Planning

Chair: Henry Oliver, CPRE

Sec: Annie Smith (annie@wcl.org.uk)

Minerals Subgroup:

PPS 9 Subgroup: Chair: Tony Gent, The Herpetological Conservation Trust

Sec: Helen Meech
(helen@wcl.org.uk)

Wildlife and Trade

Chair: Jenny Hawley, IFAW

Whales Subgroup: Chair: John Frizell, Greenpeace International

Sec: Annie Smith (annie@wcl.org.uk)

TASK FORCES

Access of Motorised Vehicles in the Countryside

Chair: Donna O'Brien, Council for National Parks

Sec: Pippa Langford
(pippa@wcl.org.uk)

Biodiversity

Chair: Martin Harper, RSPB

Sec: Annie Smith (annie@wcl.org.uk)

Marine Nature Conservation

Chair: Stuart Singleton-White, WWF

Vice Chair: Sharon Thompson, RSPB

Bycatch Subgroup: Chair: Ali Ross, Whale and Dolphin Conservation Society

Sec: Annie Smith (annie@wcl.org.uk)

Water Policy and Legislation

Chair: Sarah Oppenheimer, RSPB

Vice Chair: Phil Burston, RSPB

Sec: Pippa Langford
(pippa@wcl.org.uk)

OVERARCHING

Defra Modernisation Review

Sec: Pippa Langford
(pippa@wcl.org.uk)