

Q3 Report July – September 2004

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SECRETARIAT

Letter from the Chair...

Dear Members,

Parliament may have been in recess over the summer months but Link certainly hasn't taken its foot off the accelerator. Virtually all of the groups have been active in their respective areas of policy interest both in terms of reacting to developments and in developing their own thinking and joint positions on matters as diverse as climate change, farming, diffuse pollution and sustainable development.

Major developments this quarter included the long awaited publication of the consultation draft of Planning Policy Statement 9 (Biological and Geological Conservation), which has taken three years to emerge from the fallout of the planning reforms. Was it worth waiting for? The Link jury is unsure.

Defra has been pressing on with the fallout of the Mid Term Review of the Common Agricultural Policy. The fine print of the details of cross compliance and Good Agricultural and Environmental Condition (known by its friendly acronym of GAEC) has wide-ranging consequences for biodiversity and sympathetic land management. In July Defra's Rural Strategy was published, outlining the Government's response to the Haskins Review and confirming the intelligence already gleaned about the new Integrated Agency.

The marine environment has also seen its fair share of developments, with Link continuing to build the case for marine legislation and analysing the fallout of the recent IWC meeting. A number of marine species were among those on the agenda for the CITES conference in Bangkok in October.

On the staff front, we said goodbye to Pippa at the end of September with great sadness but as most Link reps should already know, we look forward to welcoming Alexia Wellbelove as our new Director on November 15th. Alexia comes with a wealth of marine as well as terrestrial experience.

I also look forward to welcoming as many of you as possible to our EGM on November 3rd to confirm your agreement to Link becoming a charity and also to our AGM and Christmas party on December 10th at the Barnes Wetland Centre, courtesy of the Wildfowl and Wetlands Trust. See you there!

Best wishes



Hilary Allison

“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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Working Groups

Farming and Rural Development WG

The Farming & Rural Development (FRD) group recently submitted a response to the consultation on cross compliance and Good Agricultural & Environmental Condition (GAEC). The group is also seeking written confirmation of Defra's position on the impact of the Single Payment upon traditional orchards, after a Defra official provided verbal clarification during a recent meeting.

A sub-group of the farming group is working on the issue of wildlife and bovine TB. The group submitted evidence to the EFRA Committee Inquiry into bovine TB and produced a joint response to the government consultation on its bovine TB strategy.

The FRD group continues to contribute to discussions on the Single Payment and the revised Rural Development Regulation, and recently wrote to Lord Whitty regarding the proposed exemption of small fields from requirements for 2m margins under cross compliance, raising concerns that such an exemption could have a deleterious impact on biodiversity and landscape.

Meetings:

24th August – Farming and RAG meeting
10th September – Link Farming Working Group meeting

Woodland subgroup

The Woodland group continues to operate virtually.

Land Use Planning WG

The Land Use Planning group is currently working on a guidance document for Local Authorities on how to implement the changes brought about by the Planning & Compulsory Purchase Act 2004.

The group has also written to Planning Minister Keith Hill welcoming the inclusion of local landscape designations within PPS7, whilst also raising concerns regarding the text of draft PPS1 "Creating Sustainable Communities". The group has also responded to sections of Defra's Clean Neighbourhoods consultation.

Meetings:

21st July – Working Group meeting

Minerals subgroup

The Minerals group continues to await the release of MPS1 for consultation (which is now expected in October), and recently wrote to Keith Hill MP, Minister for Housing & Planning, to provide comments ahead of the release of the consultation draft. The group also recently met with members of Defra's Landscape Protection Division to discuss Link's "Ten Principles of Sustainable Minerals Planning" document, and has requested a meeting with DTI's to further share ideas on minerals planning issues.

The group has also been invited to contribute to Defra's ALSF Land-Based Aggregates Steering Group.

Meetings:

14th July – Link minerals group meeting
14th September – Minerals meeting with Defra

PPS9 subgroup

The PPS9 group welcomed the release of the long-awaited consultation on draft PPS9, and will submit a Link response. The group has also provided comments to English Nature on the draft Good Practice Guidance (GPG) that will accompany the final PPS, and hopes to input to this further in the context of the PPS9 consultation draft.

Meetings:

21st July – PPS9 Group meeting with English Nature

Wildlife and Trade WG

The Link Trade group sent a letter to the UK CITES Management Authority at Defra at the end of September on the UK position on the proposal for a Council Decision on the Community position to be adopted on certain proposals submitted to CoP13. The UK has subsequently decided to support proposals to transfer the Irrawaddy dolphin and the yellow-crested cockatoo from Appendix II to Appendix I.

Many members of the Wildlife and Trade WG are currently in Bangkok at CITES CoP13 (2-14 October 2004). They are being represented on the UK delegation to the conference by Annie Smith of Link. Key issues to be debated at the CoP include elephants and ivory, protection for humphead wrasse, Irrawaddy dolphin, great white shark and ramin, and Asian Big Cats. The Link group held its final pre-CoP meeting with Defra and Elliot Morley on 22 September.

CITES proposals and documents can be viewed on the CITES website:
<http://www.cites.org/eng/cop/index.shtml>

Working Groups & Task Forces

Meetings:

20th July – CITES meeting with Elliot Morley
22nd September – CoP13 delegation meeting and CITES meeting with Elliot Morley

Whales subgroup

The whale group met on 7th September to consider, amongst other issues, the implications of this year's IWC meeting. The Scientific Committee meeting had progressed important work on a range of issues including noise in the marine environment and offshore developments at Sakhalin. The Commission meeting was, as usual, highly pressurised, with serious concerns over the balance of power shifting away from the Like-minded nations, and pressure building up around the Revised Management Scheme (RMS). The RMS has been under negotiation since the moratorium on commercial whaling was implemented in 1986, to set safe whaling quotas and provide a monitoring, supervision and control regime for commercial whaling should the IWC decide (by two thirds majority) to lift the moratorium. This pressure heightens the importance of defeating a Japanese proposal to CITES for a resolution urging the IWC to complete and implement the RMS.

Link members, including whale group members, were due to meet with Defra and DTI Ministers on 13th September regarding the Sakhalin II development which threatens a remnant population of western gray whales. Unfortunately this meeting was cancelled when Mr O'Brien was moved in the cabinet reshuffle, but it is hoped that Douglas Alexander, Mr O'Brien's replacement, will be keen to reschedule the meeting in the near future.

Meetings:

7th September – Whale Group meeting

Biodiversity TF

The Biodiversity Task Force (BTF) held a successful workshop on Climate Change on 5th August, which considered the delivery of conservation objectives in the context of a changing climate. The group is now drafting a paper based on the workshop to feed ideas to the England Biodiversity Group.

The BTF met on 13th September to consider the forthcoming BAP review and advocacy of the recommendations made in the recently produced Joint Links document "*Sustaining Biodiversity – revitalising the biodiversity action plan process*", among other things.

The BTF also continues to await Defra's consultations on the latest quinquennial review and on revision of Part 1 of the Wildlife and Countryside Act, both expected in the autumn.

Meetings:

13th September – Biodiversity Task Force meeting

Marine Task Force

In July the Marine Task Force (MTF) held useful meetings with the Environment Minister Elliot Morley and Nicci Collins, Special Adviser to Margaret Beckett, regarding the Link campaign for comprehensive marine legislation. The legislation briefings and working papers which the group has developed have been shared with a number of contacts, in Government departments, agencies and representatives of marine industries. It is hoped that meetings will be held with many of these contacts over the coming months.

A letter from CEOs of the MTF member organisations welcoming the publication of the RMNC report and calling for urgent government action was printed in the Times in July, and the group has continued to respond to consultations on aspects of marine management – e.g. a DCMS review of the protection for marine cultural heritage, EN's consultation on its Maritime Strategy and Defra's Review of Marine Fisheries and Environmental Enforcement.

The MTF is also continuing to develop plans for a lobby event to be held at Westminster next March. The group has nominated Ben Stafford of the RSPB to take the role of Campaign Chair.

Meetings:

20th July – MTF meeting with Nicci Collins, Special Adviser to Margaret Beckett
3rd August – MTF campaign meeting
1st September – MTF meeting
16th September – MTF campaign meeting

Bycatch subgroup

Following Greenpeace's legal challenge, Fisheries Minister Ben Bradshaw announced that he had requested the European Commission take emergency measures to ban the bass pair trawl fishery due to its impact on cetacean populations and the absence of mitigation measures. The Commission rejected this request, and Bradshaw announced on 27th September that he would be taking unilateral action by banning pair trawling for sea bass within the UK's 12 nautical mile limit, and capping the UK fleet in this fishery. There are concerns that this will make little difference for the dolphin populations – it will simply move the effort offshore, and therefore reduce the number of corpses being washed up on beaches in SW England, and with it the

Task Forces

pressure on politicians to take further action.

The Bycatch group will be meeting Mr Bradshaw in the coming weeks to discuss the UK's implementation of the EU Bycatch Regulation.

Water TF

The Water group continues to work on the periodic review of water pricing, and wrote to the Prime Minister and the Chancellor of the Exchequer following the publication of OFWAT's draft price determinations in August. The group welcomed the retention of the majority of schemes under the environmental programme, but urged government to reconsider and reinstate schemes such as those to improve the Hampshire Avon, Rutland Water and the Camel, to protect bathing waters from the effects of pollution from storm sewage discharges especially in the North West, and to help meet the requirements of the Freshwater Fish Directive.

The long awaited consultation on "Developing Measures to Promote Catchment Sensitive Farming" was finally launched by Defra in late June. Link submitted a response to this consultation, and published a joint statement proposing a solution to the problem of diffuse pollution from agriculture.

The group has also been sharing intelligence regarding the consultation on characterisation, which will set the standards for Good Ecological Status of water bodies.

Meetings:

23rd July – Task Force meeting with Water UK
23rd July – Task Force meeting with EN and EA
2nd September – Link Water Meeting

Access of Motorised Vehicles in the Countryside

The group responded to the consultation on motorised access to the countryside, and is now working on making this response more "user friendly" so that it can be circulated more widely to interested MPs and others. Defra have stated that they will be revising "Making the Best of Byways" later this year, so the group will be writing to the department in advance of this to convey some key Link messages.

Sustainable Development

A Link response was submitted to "Taking it on: developing UK sustainable development strategy together" at the end of July, with sign-up from 24 organisations. Many thanks to our fantastic volunteer Alex Connor, who coordinated this response.

Sister Links

Sister Links



Network for Organisations interested in the Environment

Northern Ireland Environment Link (NIEL)

NIEL is continuing its Strategic Review process, and has had numerous meetings to finalise the Strategic Plan, which is now in final draft. News on funding from Environment and Heritage Service is expected shortly, and NIEL hopes to have a full team in place from February 2005.

A Fact Sheet on 'Changing Rural Perceptions' has been produced, and NIEL continues to work very hard on the campaign for an Environmental Protection Agency for NI; analysis of 106 consultation responses has been completed and the report will be presented to the Minister on 19 October.



Wales Environment Link (WEL)

After input from Wales Environment Link and other stakeholders, final versions of the Wales Spatial Plan and the Wales Sustainable Development Action Plan produced by the Welsh Assembly Government are expected this autumn. WEL also contributed some critical comments about the UK Sustainable Development Strategy to the Virtual Panel consultation.

An 'Environment Strategy for Wales' remains WEL's main priority, and the Chair of WEL, Tony Prater of the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds, has begun secondment working with the Strategy Team (a management and drafting group) one day per week.

Recruitment is underway for a candidate to replace Gethyn Williams as WEL's Assembly Information Officer, and it is hoped that the post will be filled by December.



Scottish Environment Link (SEL)

SEL held a Funding seminar on 8 September, which was attended by Reps from nine member bodies. Board and staff attended for information and discussion of SEL's funding sources, Corporate Strategy objectives for subscription income, recent trends, how to make SEL more financially secure in the medium term, agreement of core services, and a tool for work planning.

After a relatively quiet August due to recess and holidays, the parliamentary front was particularly active in September, with meetings between Jess and party researchers and MSPs; 2 meetings between various SEL convenors and clerks and researchers; a very successful the parliamentary training day for members; an encouraging marine campaign event in the new building presenting a powerful and alternative 'voice from the coast'; and a joint meeting between the Parliamentary Forum and the **everyone** campaign. The Executive received over 1,500 responses to 'Widening the Right of Appeal' consultation, of which 951 were

generated by SEL's **everyone** campaign.

On 22 September, SEL held a dinner to welcome Fred Edwards as its new President. It was a convivial evening and great networking event with 34 attendees, and Ross Finnie, as guest of honour, delivered a short speech.

The Agriculture Task Force put in a response to the SEERAD consultation on the new 2 Tier Scheme after meetings with NFUS, FWAG and SAC, and hope the agri-environmental options will be much improved.

The Biodiversity Task Force launched the Joint Links 'Sustaining Biodiversity: revitalising the BAP process' report at Edinburgh Zoo on 7 Sept. SEL's response to the Biodiversity Implementation Plans has been drawn up with input from marine, agriculture, planning, freshwater, sustainable Scotland and climate change task forces, and was submitted with 17 member bodies signed up.

The Freshwater Task Force responded to SEPA's Pressures and Impacts on Scotland's water environment consultation, which is yet another important step in implementing the WFD. The group is preparing a strategy on flooding in Scotland and have input to the Executive's work on Sustainable Flood Management.

The Sustainable Development Task Force has submitted a response to the UK consultation on sustainable development 'Taking it on'. SEL has also commented to the Sunday Herald on the Environment Committee's report on the Executive's performance on sustainable development.

News from the WCL Secretariat

Management Committee Meeting

The third Management Committee meeting of 2004 was held on 23rd September. Issues discussed included quarterly accounts, the 2005 budget, AGM planning, Link's charity status application, communications strategy and planning for Link's 25-year anniversary in 2005.

Other Link news...

WCL would like to extend a fond farewell to Pippa Langford, and thank her for all her hard work as Director for the past three years. We wish her all the best in her new role as Principal Manager for Sustainable Land Management at the Countryside Agency.

WCL has appointed Pippa's successor in the shape of Alexia Wellbelove (known to some of you as Alexia Cummins) who is the International Conservation Manager at the Marine Stewardship Council. She has extensive experience of managing multiple stakeholder relationships and has also worked at Bat Conservation Trust, People's Trust for Endangered Species and Tuskforce. We very much look forward to welcoming her to Link on Monday 15 November.

In the interim period, during which Annie Smith attends the CITES conference in Bangkok, Helen Meech will be covering all policy areas with support from Jen Bolton. Jen, who left Link last year to be a full time mum, will be returning to provide three days a week administrative cover (Mondays, Thursday and Fridays) until 12 November.

Finally, WCL would like to thank former volunteers Alex Connor and Asha Bobb-Semple for their hard work during the summer. Alex is now fundraising for Comic Relief, and Asha has finished her MSc and has returned home to Jamaica. We wish them well in their future endeavours.

There are some important dates in the Link diary coming up soon which I would like to draw your attention to. The first of these is an **Extraordinary General Meeting** to discuss WCL's intention to apply for charity status. This will be held on **Wednesday 3rd November 2004 at 3.30pm** in the **Scott Room, WWF's London Offices, 3 Southwark St, SE1 1RQ**. I very much hope that many of you will be able to attend this meeting to discuss this exciting opportunity for WCL and our members.

The second date for your diaries is WCL's **Annual General Meeting** which will be held on **Friday 10th December at 3pm** at the **London Wetland Centre** – many thanks to the Wildfowl and Wetlands Trust for kindly agreeing to host us this year. You will receive formal notification of our AGM via your Link rep in the coming weeks, but in the meantime if you would like to stand for election to our Management Committee or as a group chair, or would like to put forward a resolution, please do not hesitate to contact Helen (helen@wcl.org.uk). The AGM will of course be followed by the Link Christmas Party – definitely not to be missed!!

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

Land Use Planning

Chair: Henry Oliver, CPRE
Sec: Helen Meech (helen@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: Helen Meech (helen@wcl.org.uk)

Biodiversity

Chair: Martin Harper, RSPB
Sec: Annie Smith (annie@wcl.org.uk)

Marine Nature Conservation

Campaign Chair: Ben Stafford, RSPB
Policy 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: Helen Meech (helen@wcl.org.uk)