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SECRETARIAT

Q4 Report October - December 2004

Letter from the Chair...

Dear Members,

In the run up to the Christmas period Link's working groups and task forces have continued working at pace with many meetings held over the quarter. Defra's plans for the formation of an Integrated Agency are progressing fast and continue to challenge Link members. As a result this will be one of Link's main priorities in the first part of 2005 with Link's seat on Defra's Stakeholder Group being a vital way of feeding information to and from our smaller members.

The CITES CoP13 meeting was held in October in Thailand and was attended by many Link members including Annie Smith who was the Link representative on the UK delegation. The Wildlife and Trade group will be reflecting on the outcomes of this meeting early in 2005. Our thanks go to Sarah Fowler of the Shark Trust whose presence allowed Link to exercise our vote for several resolutions at the IUCN meeting in November also in Thailand.

Other events of note over the past few months are the publication in November of the long-awaited draft MPS1 for consultation which the Minerals group will be responding to in the New Year, and in December the announcement by Ofwat of final water price determinations, which included 90% of the proposed investments within the environment programme thanks to pressure from the Link Water Task Force.

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

Link also held an EGM to discuss its application for charity status in November and our AGM in December. Both were well attended and many thanks to all those who came along – you'll be pleased to know that in early January our charity application was approved and Link is now a registered charity.

On the staff front during this quarter we welcomed Alexia Wellbelove who started at Link in November. I'd also like to take this opportunity to thank Helen for managing extraordinarily well on her own in the Link office for much of this busy quarter with some welcome back up from former Link staff member, Jen Bolton.

Best wishes



Hilary Allison



Wildlife and Countryside Link
89 Albert Embankment, London
SE1 7TP
T: 020 7820 8600;
F: 020 7820 8620
E: enquiry@wcl.org.uk
W: www.wcl.org.uk

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Working Groups

Farming and Rural Development WG

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.

The FRD group has also provided comments on a series of draft Defra handbooks on the entry-level, higher-tier and organic agri-environment schemes. Members of the group have also responded individually to the consultation on the revised Rural Development Regulation.

Woodland subgroup

The Woodland group continues to operate virtually.

Land Use Planning WG

The Land Use Planning group recently wrote 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.

The Planning group is now working on a spatial planning briefing intended to assist local authorities and others implement the changes

brought about by the Planning & Compulsory Purchase Act 2004. The group is next due to meet on 15th February and will discuss the final PPS1 (due to be launched at the Sustainable Communities Summit on 1st February) as well as meeting with Airport Watch to discuss various issues relating to aviation.

Minerals subgroup

The Minerals group 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 the DTI to further share ideas on minerals planning issues.

The long-awaited consultation on MPS1 was published on 24th November. The group has requested a meeting with the Minister to discuss Link's key concerns, and will also meet representatives from the Planning Officers Society, DTI, Countryside Agency, English Nature and others during the consultation period. A Link response to the consultation will be submitted.

PPS9 subgroup

The PPS9 group welcomed the release of the long-awaited consultation on draft PPS9 and the accompanying legal circular in September. The group recently submitted a joint response to both documents with sign-up from 16 organisations. Link will now continue to input comments and case studies to English Nature on the Good Practice

Guidance that will accompany the final PPS.

Wildlife and Trade WG

Many members of the Wildlife and Trade WG attended CITES CoP13 in Bangkok in October, along with Annie Smith of Link who acted as the Link representative on the UK delegation. Outcomes of the CoP included: Appendix II listing for great white shark, humphead wrasse and ramin; Appendix I listing for the Irrawaddy dolphin; and adoption of an important decision relating to enforcement of trade controls for Asian Big Cats and a UK-led resolution on Great Apes. Japan's proposals to downlist certain minke whale populations and its associated resolution calling on the IWC to adopt and implement the RMS were defeated (and Japan failed to gain the support necessary to re-introduce the debate on the minke whale proposal). In the final plenary session, the conference voted in favour of a proposal for non-commercial sale of worked ivory from Namibia (in the form of traditional jewellery, ekipas).

Documents and reports from CoP13 can be viewed on the CITES website - <http://www.cites.org/eng/cop/index.shtml>.

Whales subgroup

The group met in November to discuss the outcomes of this year's IWC meeting, in particular the adopted resolution outlining a timetable for progress on the RMS. An IWC meeting focusing on the

Working Groups & Task Forces

RMS (the RMS working group) was held at the end of November, and another is scheduled for March 2005. The November meeting showed up major differences between countries on what the RMS should include.

In November, a number of Link members met three ministers - Douglas Alexander MP (Minister for Trade), Elliot Morley MP (Minister for Environment) and Gareth Thomas MP (Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State in DFID) - to discuss the Sakhalin II oil and gas development. The UK is considering lending funds for this development through the Export Credit Guarantee Department and the European Bank on Reconstruction and Development. The threats this development poses to the critically endangered Western Gray Whale were a top-line issue for this meeting, where broader biodiversity and social impacts, and principles relating to assessment for IFI funded projects were also discussed. This seemed to be considered by all parties to be a very useful meeting, and it is hoped that a similar one will be possible prior to the UK government's final decision (which will not be taken before next Spring) on whether to approve funding for the development. An IUCN expert panel examining the potential effects of development options on the western gray whale is now expected to report in mid-February.

Biodiversity TF

The Biodiversity Task Force (BTF) continues to engage with the BAP review through

involvement with a number of the UK Biodiversity Partnership groups, and advocacy of the recommendations made in the Joint Links document "Sustaining Biodiversity – revitalising the biodiversity action plan process".

The group recently submitted a discussion paper to the England Biodiversity Group (EBG) entitled "Biodiversity Conservation in a Changing Climate", based on discussions held during the climate change workshop in August. Representatives of the BTF met with Defra during November to discuss this paper, and to catch up on progress with the BAP review. This paper was presented at an EBG workshop on climate change and was well-received, and Link has been invited to contribute to a new EBG sub-group on adaptation to inevitable climate change.

The BTF held a useful meeting in December where they heard from Doug Hulyer (WWT), the Chair of the England Biodiversity Strategy's Education and Public Understanding Group, on an exciting initiative the group is working on with the BBC. The meeting also included an update by English Nature on developments relating to the Integrated Agency and progress on the SSSI PSA target, and an excellent jam and chutney competition! Congratulations to all prize winners!

Over the Christmas break, long awaited consultations on the review of Part I of the Wildlife and Countryside Act and on the latest Quinquennial Review were published, and

the group will work on responses to these in the first quarter of 2005.

Marine Task Force

The Marine Task Force (MTF) is currently developing its plans for a lobby event to be held in March.

The MTF's working papers on marine legislation have been sent to contacts in Government departments, agencies and representatives of marine industries, and MTF members have started to have meetings with many of these contacts. Following a useful meeting of Link members' Directors and CEOs, the MTF is scoping research on marine governance with a view to providing strong input to the expected debate around this issue.

In December, Elliot Morley addressed the All Party Parliamentary Conservation and Wildlife Group on the government's forthcoming Marine Bill. The Minister explained that he hoped a draft bill would be published for pre-legislative scrutiny in the first year of the next parliament, followed by a full Bill in 2006/07, and outlined some of the areas he expected the Bill to address.

Bycatch subgroup

Following the EC's rejection of the UK's request for emergency measures to stop the seabass pair-trawl fishery due to its impact on common dolphin populations, Fisheries Minister Ben Bradshaw announced on 27th September that the UK would take

Task Forces

unilateral action, by banning pair trawling for sea bass within the UK's 12 nautical mile limit, and capping the UK fleet involved in this fishery. Link responded to Defra's consultation on these proposals with concerns that they would make little difference for dolphin populations, as they would simply displace effort offshore, and would not affect the larger, French component of the fishery. Link called for the prohibition to be extended throughout UK waters and applied to all vessels involved in the fishery.

The bycatch group met Mr Bradshaw in November to discuss the UK's implementation of the EU Bycatch Regulation, calling for the government to take actions beyond those which were strictly required by the EU.

Water TF

The Water Task Force (WTF) recently submitted a response to the long-awaited consultation on diffuse water pollution from agriculture - the "Developing Measures to Promote Catchment-Sensitive Farming" consultation. The group has also been sharing intelligence regarding the consultation on characterisation, which will set the standards for Good Ecological Status of water bodies.

The group held a successful meeting with the Salmon & Trout Association and the Association of Rivers Trusts in November to share comments and intelligence on a range of issues including diffuse water

pollution, the periodic review of water pricing, flood risk management etc, and to discuss the potential for future collaboration on issues of common interest.

The WTF was delighted that Ofwat's final water price determinations announced on 2nd December included £3.258 billion for environmental improvements (20% of the total package), of which £492 million will be allocated for nature conservation projects.

The group also submitted a Link response to the Environment Agency Consultation on characterisation that will set the standards for Good Ecological Status of water bodies.

Access of Motorised Vehicles in the Countryside

The group responded to the consultation on motorised access to the countryside, and continues to await the publication of follow-up documents by Defra.

Integrated Agency

The Draft Bill (currently titled the 'Modernising Rural Delivery bill') is expected to be published for pre-legislative scrutiny at the end of January 2005. There is both internal and external expectation that Link will work on this issue and the pre-legislative scrutiny period will be a key opportunity for Link to provide input on the draft bill. The likely timing for this stakeholder consultation period is February to March 2005. Link will also participate in the Defra IA Stakeholder

Group meetings in 2005 which feed into the IA project.

Sister Links



Northern Ireland Environment Link (NIEL)

The consultation for the Strategic Planning is over and a bid for funding for two additional core members has been sent to EHS. NIEL are now waiting for a reply and are hoping to employ a Membership and Information Officer and a Policy Officer early this year.

The project "Cultivating Creativity" was very successful. Aideen McGinley, Permanent Secretary of DCAL asked NIEL to produce a travelling exhibition that she launched at DCAL headquarters in July. NIEL have learned that the use of artistic techniques to raise environmental awareness is very effective.

NIEL also produced comments on the Sustainable Development Strategy and PPS14.

The Rural Community Project appointed two members of staff to produce an Environmental Action Pack for rural community groups. The consultation was very successful and a Steering Group has been set up to oversee the pack's development.



Wales Environment Link (WEL)

WEL unfortunately lost Assembly Information Officer (AIO) Gethyn Williams to another career in September, so much of Q4 was occupied with appointing a replacement. WEL are now happy to announce that new AIO Hannah Pitt started bright eyed and bushy tailed on 1st January 05. She can be contacted at : hpitt@wcva.org.uk, or by phone on 02920 431716. In the interim Iwan Ball provided welcome AIO cover for the intervening three months. He is currently working with WWF Cymru on a series of marine briefings.

Dr Tony Prater (RSPB Cymru) has been seconded 1 day per week, on behalf of WEL, to assist with the design and drafting of the Environment Strategy for Wales. WEL also have three representatives on the Reference Group chaired by the Minister for Environment, Planning and Countryside to oversee the production of the Strategy. Currently WEL are reasonably pleased with progress being made, and expects a consultation draft to be published in April.

Members of WEL decided to convene a marine working group meeting in December to consider how/how fully/if WEL would be actively engaged in either the WCL or WWF marine campaigns. WEL will

develop a briefing paper considering issues affecting the marine environment in a Welsh context for use with Welsh Assembly Members, MP's and civil servants.

WEL members also decided to convene a Health and Environment working group, which met in December. This is a new and interesting policy direction for WEL, with plans for seminars and other projects in hand for early 2005.

As part of its review in Wales the Welsh Assembly Government decided to take Tir Gofal (the all Wales Agri-Environment Scheme) away from CCW and bring it in house, alongside the Entry Level and Landscape Scale schemes (collectively to be known as Tir Cymru) from 2007. WEL had previously written to the Minister strongly opposing such a move.

Wales Spatial Plan has finally been published & can be downloaded from: <http://www.wales.gov.uk/themesspatialplan/content/spatial-plan-e.htm>

Pre-empting the UK SD Strategic Framework by 6 months the SD Action Plan for Wales was published (to a broadly positive audience) in October. This is not expected to be reviewed following publication of the UK Strategy. <http://www.wales.gov.uk/themessustainabledev/content/revi-ew/action-plan-scheme-e.pdf>

HMG announced inclusion of Transport (Wales) Bill which will see further powers and responsibilities fall to the Assembly. The Minister for Economic Development and

Sister Links

Transport announced in December an £8 billion investment into creating an integrated transport system for Wales. Most of the money is earmarked for road/motorway building and subsidy of air transport in Wales. This programme, in particular confirmation of the final route of the new M4 section around Newport (across part of the Gwent Levels), will certainly be the subject of much scrutiny by environmental organisations over the next few years.



Scottish Environment Link (SEL)

The last quarter has been another busy one for SEL, with the next phase of the "everyone" campaign now underway. For the forecasted general elections and upcoming G8 meeting in Gleneagles, everyone will be focusing on Climate Change. This campaign's focus offers opportunities to every member of LINK, as climate change has such wide-ranging consequences, from landscape and biodiversity on through to how we travel and generate energy in the future. Workshops on climate change and the campaign are scheduled for February 2005 - contact Susan Warren (susan@scotlink.org) for further details.

The Agriculture Task Force has been as busy as ever collating a LINK response to the draft Rural Development

Regulation, collating a LINK response on ideas for Tier 3 of Land Management Contracts from 2007 onwards, attending Land Management Contract Working Group and CAP Stakeholder Group meetings, holding a successful training day for regional and local LINK staff on the Single Farm Payment with SEERAD, and continuing to input to development of Scottish Biodiversity Strategy Rural Implementation Plan agriculture actions. The major piece of work during 2005 will be a report and conference on what Scotland's agriculture could deliver for the environment.

Other task forces have also been busy. The Biodiversity Task Force has co-ordinated LINK's active engagement in the Scottish Biodiversity Strategy Implementation Plans, and the Freshwater Task Force has met with the Scottish Executive's Water Services Team to discuss the Quality and Standards III consultation, and has input into the development of Rural Stewardship Scheme, with plans to continue its close partnership with the Agriculture Task Force on this. SEL's Marine Task Force has been busy responding to a variety of consultations, including that of the Scottish Coastal Forum urging co-ordinated strategic thinking across the Executive on a new way of managing Scotland's marine resources. The Woodlands Task Force has responded to the amendment to the Land Reform (Scotland) Act on access to woods and forests.

SEL also has a new Landscape Task Force, established to move forward the debate about the pressures facing Scotland's landscape and how they may be addressed, potentially through new legislation.

A celebration evening was held on 22nd September to welcome Fred Edwards as SEL's President. Minister Ross Finnie MSP was the guest of honour and spoke warmly of Fred's personal qualities and track record. The event was well-attended by SEL members and guests from key sectors working with SEL.

The Charity Law Reform also remains high on SEL's Agenda.

News from the Link Secretariat

Management Committee Meeting

The fourth Management Committee meeting of 2004 was held on 24th November. Issues discussed included quarterly accounts, the 2005 budget and workplan, AGM planning, Link's charity status application, and planning for Link's 25-year anniversary in 2005.

Other Link news...

Link was delighted to welcome new Director Alexia Wellbelove to the team on 15th November. Alexia previously worked as International Conservation Manager at the Marine Stewardship Council and is looking forward to meeting many Link members within the coming months.

In the interim period between Pippa's departure and Alexia starting at Link, during which Annie Smith attended the CITES conference in Bangkok, Helen Meech covered all policy areas with support from Jen Bolton. Jen, who left Link last year to be a full time mum, returned to provide three days a week administrative cover, and all at Link would like to thank Jen for all her hard work and support during this very busy period.

Link would also like to extend thanks to long-term volunteer Sarah Eaton who left Link in November to take up the post of Species Conservation Assistant with the RSPB. We wish her all the best in her new role.

Link was also pleased to welcome 2 new members in

Q4: the National Federation of Biological Recorders and the Pond Conservation Trust, bringing membership up to a healthy 35.

The WCL Secretariat met with colleagues from the Sister Links in Edinburgh in November to discuss issues of shared interest and potential for joint campaigning across the Links.

Link also held an EGM to discuss its application for charity status in November and our AGM in December. Both were well attended and many thanks to all those who came along – you'll be pleased to know that in early January our charity application was approved and Link is now a registered charity.

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: Alexia Wellbelove

(alexia@wcl.org.uk)

Land Use Planning

Chair: Henry Oliver, CPRE

Sec: Helen Meech

(helen@wcl.org.uk)

Minerals Subgroup: Chair: Ruth

Chambers, Council for National Parks

PPS 9 Subgroup: Chair: Tony Gent,

The Herpetological Conservation Trust

Sec: Helen Meech

(helen@wcl.org.uk)

Wildlife and Trade

Chair: Jenny Hawley, IFAW

Vice Chair: Cathy Williamson, WDCCS

Whales Subgroup: Chair: John

Frizell, Greenpeace International

Vice Chair: Leah Garces, WSPA

Vice Chair: Virag Kaufer, WSPA

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: Alexia Wellbelove

(alexia@wcl.org.uk)

Biodiversity

Chair: Martin Harper, RSPB

Vice Chair: Nigel Bourn, Butterfly Conservation

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

Marine Nature Conservation

Campaign Chair: Ben Stafford, RSPB

Policy Chair: Sharon Thompson, RSPB

RSPB

Vice Chair: Melissa Moore, MCS

Bycatch Subgroup:

Chair: Ali Ross, WDCCS

Vice Chair: Lissa Goodwin, Marine Connection

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)