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*“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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Q4 Report October - December 2005

Letter from the Chair...

Dear Members,

Work has continued apace this quarter in all Link's Working Groups and Task Forces, as we prepare for a raft of policy documents being developed for consultation in 2006. Legislative work also continues, with the NERC and Commons Bills both entering the House of Lords during the quarter, which Link has continued to influence through the development of briefings for parliamentarians.

This quarter also saw the celebration of Link's 25th anniversary. These were focused around the parliamentary reception held in early November, at which the Minister, Ben Bradshaw MP, noted that Link was "the best umbrella group in the country, if not the world!" Fine praise indeed. Mr Bradshaw put forward a number of challenges to the sector, highlighting the need to build upon the solid foundations we have laid in our first 25 years.

Our 25th anniversary review document, *Making the Link*, produced to mark the occasion and launched at the parliamentary reception catalogues Link's achievements to date, from our first campaign on the Wildlife and Countryside Act through to our current campaign for a Marine Bill. The document has been extremely well received and Link intends to use it to continue to improve our reputation with all our partners and influence policy development over the next 25 years.

Best wishes

Hilary Allison

Working Groups

Farming and Rural Development WG

Link was invited to join the new Rural Development 2007 Policy Advisory Group (PAG), which will be meeting monthly in the run up to the consultation period and beyond, providing Ministers with advice on the development of the draft National Strategy. Link has submitted comments on successive drafts of the National Strategy Consultation document in advance of the formal consultation period in 2006.

Link was represented at the first meeting of the Agricultural Change and Environment (ACE) Observatory in early October, by John Cousins. The ACE Observatory focuses on the environmental effects of CAP reform, primarily land use change and its effects on biodiversity, landscape and heritage. In November, the FRD group met and discussed input to the PAG, Environmental Stewardship and Link's proposed work on Bioenergy crops. The group was also updated on plans for developing a vision for CAP and hopes to prepare a position statement on GM.

At Link's AGM, Ian Woodhurst (CPRE) and Nick Collinson (Woodland Trust) were elected by the membership to serve as Chair and Vice Chair respectively of the FRD group in 2006.

Bovine TB and Badgers

In October, Link prepared a statement on bovine tuberculosis (bTB) in cattle which was sent to Defra Ministers Margaret Beckett, Ben Bradshaw and Jim Knight in early November. It calls for further consideration of the use

of bTB testing, public consultation on badger culling proposals and a delay in culling until all data from the Krebs' Trial is published in a peer reviewed scientific journal. Badger Trust distributed a news release to media contacts highlighting Link's statement.

In a parliamentary statement on 15th December, Ben Bradshaw MP announced a series of new measures including the statutory pre-movement testing of cattle, the rationalisation of compensation to farmers and the launch of a 12 week consultation on badger culling – both the principle behind this and the strategy/method. Whilst the proposed badger culling measures will be subject to consultation, the cattle measures will be introduced without further consultation in February 2006.

Woodland subgroup

In October, Hilary Allison became the Link representative on the England Forestry Strategy (EFS) Review Steering Group and attended a meeting in November. A draft of the EFS was circulated in advance of the England Forestry Forum meeting in November. The public consultation period is expected to take place in early 2006.

The Forestry Commission held meetings in November and December on the EAFRD, with attendance by over 20 bodies including CLA, Small Woods Association, RSPB and England Forest Industries Partnership. Although Link was not represented at this meeting, Hilary Allison attended on behalf of the Woodland Trust and reported that the meeting focused on bringing everyone up to speed on where the development of the new

England Rural Development Plan had got to in respect of forestry.

In December, it was decided that Link's Woodland Group would move from being a virtual group to holding a number of meetings in 2006, with the first meeting to be scheduled for early in the New Year. At Link's AGM, Mike Wood (RSPB) and James Cooper (Woodland Trust) were elected to serve as Chair and Vice Chair respectively of the Woodland group in 2006.

Land Use Planning WG

In May 2005, the Land Use Planning (LUP) group agreed to call for a single comprehensive statement on spatial planning and climate change. The group wrote to John Prescott and Margaret Beckett pointing out the major and positive contribution spatial planning has to make, both in promoting lifestyles that reduce emissions and in facilitating a countryside that is resilient to the effects of climate change. Replies were received from Defra and ODPM, each directing Link to the other department! The group therefore agreed to seek a meeting with the Minister for Climate Change, Elliot Morley, and Minister for Housing, Yvette Cooper to pursue the issue further. In addition, members of the group met with the Town and Country Planning Association to discuss work on climate change, and several Link members are now involved with the TCPA campaign on this issue.

In November, the LUP group met to discuss its workplan for 2006, PPS3/Barker and the EAC inquiry on Sustainable Housing, the appropriate assessment of spatial plans (European Court judgement)

Working Groups

and a potential PPS on water. It was agreed a Link response should be prepared on the forthcoming PPS3 consultation early in the New Year.

The LUP Group also continued this quarter to work on a spatial planning briefing intended to assist local authorities and others implement the changes brought about by the Planning & Compulsory Purchase Act 2004. A small subgroup met throughout October and November to edit the briefing, and the document was finalised in December. It will be distributed to planning authorities and other key stakeholders early in 2006.

At Link's AGM, Henry Oliver (CPRE) was re-elected by the membership to serve as Chair of the Land Use Planning group in 2006. The group will have two Vice Chairs; Ed Pomfret (Woodland Trust) will serve as Vice Chair (Planning) and Ruth Chambers (Council for National Parks) as Vice Chair (Minerals).

Minerals subgroup

In October, members of the Minerals Sub-Group attended an ODPM workshop on the *Annexes to Minerals Policy Statement 1: Planning and Minerals* (MPS1) in advance of the preparation of a Link response. The consultation sought comments on planning matters in the supply of aggregates, brick clay, building & roofing stone, and oil & gas. The group submitted its response to ODPM in early November.

Due to the winding down of the ODPM-led minerals planning policy programme, the Minerals sub-group will be subsumed into its parent group – the Land Use Planning group – as of January 2006. This group will

continue to track developments in minerals planning policy, pushing for a step-change away from a “predict and provide” towards a “plan, monitor and manage” approach, based on the concept of environmental capacity.

Wildlife and Trade WG

The Wildlife and Trade Group met in October to discuss the Consultation on the use of powers under Article 8.2 (Council Reg 338/97) to prohibit the keeping of CITES specimens, to which a Link response was later submitted. The group has also been invited by Defra to submit draft proposals for the CoP14 of CITES which will be held in June 2007 in The Netherlands.

Also this quarter, Debbie Banks (EIA) represented Link at the EU Wildlife Trade Enforcement Co-ordination Workshop, attended by Police, Customs, the CITES Secretariat and Management Authorities, law and policy consultants, and TRAFFIC. Debbie gave a short presentation of the work of Link's Wildlife & Trade Group, which was very well received by those in attendance.

At Link's AGM, Rob Atkinson (RSPCA) and Cathy Williamson (WDCS) were both re-elected to serve as Chair and Vice-Chair respectively of the Wildlife and Trade Working Group in 2006.

Whales subgroup

In this quarter, Defra proposed a number of changes to the structure of the Fish II team which were of some concern to the Link whale group. A delegation of Link members met Rodney Anderson, Director of Fisheries at Defra, in October to discuss leaving the current team within the fisheries

department to ensure that they are able to make the most of fisheries expertise available. Following these meetings, Link understands that the structure of the Fish II team is secure for the near future.

The Whale subgroup met twice this quarter to discuss next steps and activities for the upcoming months including the arrangements for meeting London-based Embassy officials from those countries that have recently joined as members of the IWC. The group continues to work to ensure action is taken to maintain the UK's strong position against scientific whaling at the highest diplomatic levels. It sent a briefing to the UK Government entitled '*Taking the Initiative at the IWC*' and wrote to the Prime Minister requesting his action. The group also met with officials from Defra and the Foreign and Commonwealth Office to follow up on the recent Special Like-Minded meeting and to discuss Link's recent briefing sent to the UK delegation.

In December, the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development found the Sakhalin II project 'fit for purpose', launching their 120 day consultation period. The Group will be meeting with UK Ministers from Defra, DfID and the DTI in January 2006 to discuss Sakhalin.

At Link's AGM John Frizell (Greenpeace Int.) was re-elected by the membership to serve as Chair of the Whale subgroup with Leah Garces (WSPA) and Virag Kaufer (WSPA) re-elected as Vice Chairs.



Task Forces

Biodiversity TF

The Biodiversity Task Force (BTF) continues to monitor the provisions arising from the review of Part 1 of the Wildlife and Countryside Act that will be taken forward through the NERC Bill. The group sent briefings to a number of MPs on clause 40 and the proposed amendment for a duty upon public bodies to “further the conservation of biodiversity”, to inform debate during the Bill’s Report Stage.

In October the BTF wrote to Defra regarding the implementation of the recommendations within their 2003 Review of Non-Native Species Policy. A letter was also sent to the Secretary of State, Margaret Beckett, regarding the quinquennial review of the Wildlife and Countryside Act, urging Defra to ensure that the 4th quinquennial review is promptly brought to a conclusion and that the 5th review starts promptly in 2006, with a clear timetable from the outset.

In November, the BTF finalised a Joint Links statement on the BAP review, which it submitted to Defra. Representatives met with Defra’s Biodiversity Unit, English Nature and JNCC to discuss this paper and identify potential ways forward. JNCC agreed to work up a model for the next stage of the review process, and Link will work closely with them to help develop this. As a follow-up to the meeting, the BTF agreed to write to Steve Lee-Bapty, Deputy Head of Defra’s European Wildlife Division, for clarification on the next stages of the review process.

The BTF also continues to work in conjunction with the Joint Links on a leaflet to raise

awareness of the 2010 target to halt biodiversity loss. The leaflet is aimed at key decision-makers to encourage action to meet the target over the next five years, summarising what the target means, what is needed to achieve it and how progress should be measured. It is hoped to launch the leaflet in January 2006.

BTF members continue to contribute to external biodiversity fora, attending recent meetings of the UK Standing Committee and the England Biodiversity Group. A representative of the BTF has also been given a place on the Steering Group planning the 2006 UK Biodiversity Partnership Conference, and attended the first meeting of this group in November.

At Link’s AGM, Martin Harper (RSPB) and Nigel Bourn (Butterfly Conservation) were re-elected by the membership to serve as Chair and Vice Chair respectively of the Biodiversity Task Force (BTF) in 2006.

Marine TF

In this quarter, the Marine Task Force (MTF) developed and circulated a series of policy working papers setting out what Link believes the Marine Bill must contain, as a minimum, in order to fulfil the Government’s commitments to protect marine biodiversity and ecosystems, including recommendations on marine protected areas, marine spatial planning, marine biodiversity and inshore fisheries. Defra plan to publish a consultation package on the draft Marine Bill early in 2006, with a view to publishing a draft Bill in October 2006. It is likely that a second Marine Bill Forum meeting will be held following

the publication of this consultation package.

In October, a Joint Links Marine meeting was held to share information on marine work in each country, discuss policy positions and to identify areas for joint working. Both Northern Irish and Scottish NGOs are calling for distinct marine legislation in their respective countries and it was agreed that the Joint Links will remain in close contact as the Westminster Bill develops.

Link co-sponsored the Coastal Futures conference entitled “*Towards a Marine Bill – realising the opportunity*” on 25th October. The first session of the day was chaired by Joan Edwards, Chair of Link’s Marine Task Force, and a number of Link members spoke throughout the day, including presentations on inshore fisheries and Marine Protected Areas.

The MTF has published, and circulated via the CMS network, three more in its series of Marine Bill Bulletins. Issue 3 focused on inshore fisheries management, Issue 4 on the Marine Bill and Marine Protected Areas, and Issue 5 on Marine Spatial Planning. All Link’s Marine Bill bulletins can be downloaded from our website at www.wcl.org.uk/marine_campaign.htm

The MTF also continues to meet with external stakeholders. In November, the group met with BWEA to share thoughts and intelligence on the draft Marine Bill, and with Defra’s European Wildlife Division to discuss MPAs and the potential species protection measures within the Bill. Representatives of the MTF also met with the Marine Bill

Task Forces

Team at Defra to discuss perspectives on the proposed Marine Management Organisation (MMO).

In early December, the Government published "*Safeguarding Sea Life: the joint UK response to the Review of Marine Nature Conservation*". In response, a letter from Link members was printed in The Times expressing disappointment at the lack of detail included within the report on how marine wildlife is to be protected.

In mid-December, the MTF held campaigns and policy meetings where it reviewed progress to date and made plans for the coming months. Saskia Richartz Greenpeace's EU Marine Policy Advisor also gave a useful update on the progress of the European Marine Strategy.

At Link's AGM, Ben Stafford (RSPB) was re-elected by the membership to serve as Campaigns Chair of the Marine Task Force with Anthony Field (WWF-UK) serving as Campaigns & Media Vice Chair. Joan Edwards (The Wildlife Trusts) was re-elected to serve as Policy Chair of the MTF with Melissa Moore (Marine Conservation Society) serving as Policy Vice Chair.

Bycatch subgroup

The Link bycatch group met in October to discuss EU Pinger regulations, inshore fisheries, ASCOBANS, and members' current and planned work on bycatch. The group intends to develop a position paper on the Marine Bill, and has agreed to write to the Commissioner on the EU Pinger regulation. Group

members also responded to the Seafish accreditation scheme consultation.

In November, the group wrote to Ben Bradshaw MP regarding the UK's implementation of Regulation (EC) No 812/2004 which requires fishing vessels (of 12m or over) using any bottom set gillnet or entangling net in waters to the south west of England to use acoustic deterrent devices (pingers) from 1st January 2006. The group could see little prospect of this requirement being met in the UK, and therefore urged the Minister to take immediate action to prevent the further unacceptable deaths of harbour porpoises and other cetaceans in these fisheries. The group has yet to receive a response from the Minister's office.

At Link's AGM, Ali Ross (WDCS) was re-elected to serve as Chair of the Bycatch subgroup with Lissa Goodwin (Marine Connection) as Vice Chair.

Water TF

The Water group continued to await the publication of the final Environment Agency Strategy for River Basin Planning which was expected in December 2005. A number of Link representatives also attended the CIWEM conference on *Issues Arising from the Periodic Review Process* in November. The next meeting of the Link Water Task Force is scheduled for February 2006. At Link's AGM, Sarah Oppenheimer (RSPB) was re-elected by the membership to serve as Chair of the Water Policy and Legislation Task Force with Tom Le Quesne (WWF-UK) elected as Vice Chair.

Access of Motorised Vehicles in the Countryside

In October, the issue of access of motorised vehicles to the countryside was debated in the House of Commons and again in the House of Lords during the second reading of the NERC Bill in November. At the end of the second reading the Minister, Lord Bach, announced that the Government proposes to commence the provisions at the date of Royal Assent. Only claims submitted prior to the Bill's introduction on 19th May 2005 will be kept for processing by local authorities.

As Part 6 of the published NERC Bill contains measures relevant to Rights of Way, the work of the '4X4' group is to be wound up at the end of 2005 and further monitoring of Rights of Way policy will be taken on by the current NERC Bill group.

Natural Environment and Rural Communities (NERC) Bill

The third reading/report stage took place in the House of Commons in October and the Bill was then introduced into the House of Lords. The NERC group met to discuss next steps in the timeline of the Bill and Link sent a briefing to selected Peers in advance of the Bill's second reading in the House of Lords.

The Committee stages of the NERC Bill, which were originally expected to be held and completed before Christmas, have now been postponed until mid-January 2006. It is estimated that there will be three sessions in total, one a week, leading up to half term

Task Forces

recess with the Report stage expected to take place in late February or early March. It is still hoped that Royal Assent of the Bill will take place in Spring 2006.

A Memorandum of Understanding between Natural England (NE), the Forestry Commission and the Environment Agency was published in October and Link submitted a response to the consultation on the draft strategy for NE with sign up from sixteen organisations. Further details and consultation is expected on the detailed measures, outputs and processes of NE at a later date.

In November, Margaret Beckett - Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs - announced Sir Martin

Doughty's appointment as Chair Designate of NE and interviews for the position of Chief Executive of NE took place at the end of November

Alexia attended Defra's NE Stakeholder meeting on 6th December where a revised version of NE's strategic direction was circulated and stakeholders subsequently invited to submit further comments. It has been agreed that the NERC Bill group will continue throughout 2006 during the Bill's passage through parliament and on to NE's approaching vesting date in October 2006. The group will also continue to liaise with the relevant statutory bodies throughout 2006 as NE's strategy and corporate plan are prepared

Commons Bill

The first day of the Grand Committee stage took place in the House of Lords in October and the Committee continued to meet throughout November. The Bill was then reprinted to take account of all the amendments agreed to in Grand Committee and two sessions in Report were held in the House of Lords in late November. The 3rd Reading in the House of Lords is expected to take place in January 2006.



WORKING GROUPS

Farming & Rural Development

Chair:
Ian Woodhurst, CPRE
Vice Chair:
Nick Collinson, WT
Sec: Alexia Wellbelove

Woodland Subgroup:

Chair:
Mike Wood, RSPB
Vice Chair:
James Cooper, WT
Sec: Alexia Wellbelove

Land Use Planning

Chair:
Henry Oliver, CPRE
Vice Chair (Planning):
Ed Pomfret, WT
Vice Chair (Minerals):
Ruth Chambers, CNP
Sec: Helen Meech

Wildlife and Trade

Chair:
Rob Atkinson, RSPCA
Vice Chair:
Cathy Williamson, WDCA
Sec: Alexia Wellbelove

Whales Subgroup:

Chair:
John Frizell, GP
Vice Chair:
Leah Garces, WSPA
Vice Chair:
Virag Kaufer, WSPA
Sec: Alexia Wellbelove

TASK FORCES

Biodiversity

Chair:
Martin Harper, RSPB
Vice Chair:
Nigel Bourn, BC
Sec: Helen Meech

Marine Nature Conservation Campaign

Chair:
Ben Stafford, RSPB
Vice Chair:
Anthony Field, WWF-UK
Policy

Chair:
Joan Edwards, TWT
Vice Chair:
Melissa Moore, MCS
Sec: Helen Meech

Bycatch Subgroup:

Chair: Ali Ross, WDCA
Vice Chair: Lissa Goodwin, MC
Sec: Helen Meech

Water Policy and Legislation

Chair:
Sarah Oppenheimer, RSPB
Vice Chair:
Tom Le Quesne, WWF-UK
Sec: Helen Meech

Sister Links



Northern Ireland Environment Link (NIEL)

In November, a summary of the survey of members' interests and what they want from NIEL was completed and in early December, a seminar for the Planning Appeals Commission was held, which focused on raising awareness of environmental issues. Recent consultation comments submitted or prepared include the Environment and Heritage Service Strategy, the Waste Management Strategy, DARD's Renewable Energy Strategy and proposals for Coastal Zone Management.

In January, NIEL will launch a major policy document called *'The Way Ahead'* with a seminar and presentation of the first copy of the document to the Minister of the Environment. The document will contain 10 general and 25 specific recommendations on actions needed to adequately protect the local environment. The new Policy Officer - Seamus Gallagher - will join in January to work with task forces, respond to consultation documents and liaise with government and other decision makers. He will oversee the production of a Fact Sheet on Sustainable Development, due out in March. NIEL News, which had been suspended due to staff time constraints, is now produced monthly for members and is proving very useful and popular.



Scottish Environment Link (SEL)

SEL's fourth members' congress held in late November successfully developed thinking on collective campaigning with insights from Make Poverty History and See Me Scotland campaigns, and the views from politicians whom have been targeted in previous campaigns. At Christmas, SEL held a well-attended reception for all in the environment world in Scotland.

The 15 task forces hold regular meetings to ensure integration of messages and complementary approaches. Current priorities are the Scottish Planning Bill now in the Scottish Parliament, particularly planning rights, and the build-up towards Scottish marine legislation. SEL members will meet the Holyrood Petitions Committee in January and will give evidence to the Parliament shortly.

Jane Herbstritt and Alex Hopinkson are the new parliamentary team at SEL. Together with the Scottish Environment Minister, SEL is about to preview Scottish Environment Week 2006 (6-12 Feb) with a reception fronted by the Depute First Minister. The week aims to promote and celebrate the environment and showcase SD initiatives across Scotland. SEL members are also planning a fresh 'everyone' campaign focusing round the Holyrood elections in 2007.



Wales Environment Link (WEL)

Members are continuing to work closely with the Wales Environment Strategy *'Our Environment Our Future Your Views'* and will soon be discussing and advising on it's proposed Action Plan. Much work is also underway to influence the progress of the Wales Spatial Plan process.

A 2007 Assembly Election Campaign Group has developed and has recognised a need to produce a WEL Manifesto to include policy proposals and WEL's key messages. The intention is to use it to influence the preparation of party manifestos next spring. The group has requested that all other WEL working groups provide key messages they would like included in the document.

At the moment WEL has working groups for Agriculture, Environment Strategy, Health & Environment, Planning, Policy Liaison and Marine, in addition to the new Election Campaign Working Group. Staff and members of WEL had to say goodbye to another staff member this quarter! Unfortunately for WEL, Hannah Pitt, Assembly Information Officer, left to become Policy Officer for the National Trust. A new team member was recruited in December and is due to join WEL at the end of January.



News from the Link Secretariat

Management Committee Meeting & AGM

The last Management Committee meeting of 2005 was held on 16th November. Issues discussed included Link's quarterly accounts, the budget and workplan for 2006, plans for the AGM and the review of working groups. The next meeting is scheduled for March 2006.

On 9th December Link's Annual General Meeting was held, which was kindly hosted by the Zoological Society of London. At this meeting Hilary Allison provided a review of the year and Link's accounts and subscription rates for 2006 were approved by the membership. Tim Sands, author of *Making the Link* also gave an invigorating talk as guest speaker, about some of the challenges facing Link in the future and how best Link could rise to them.

Other Link news...

This quarter Link welcomed Campaign Whale to the Link family as our first Associate Member and we said goodbye to the British Ecological Society at the end of December.

Link celebrated its 25th anniversary with a parliamentary reception at the House of Commons on 8th November, hosted by Peter Ainsworth MP. This was extremely well attended with approximately 200 guests, including a wide-range of people who have worked with Link over the past 25 years. Lord Peter Melchett (a founder of Link and our first Chair), Ben Bradshaw MP (Minister for Local Environment, Marine and Animal Welfare) and Dr Hilary Allison (Link's current Chair) all spoke at the event, praising Link's achievements to date and urging Link to continue to rise to challenges in the future.

As part of our 25th anniversary celebrations in 2005, Link published a review document entitled *Making the Link*. All our members and partners should now have received a copy of this document. If you would like any additional copies please contact the Link office.



Link's 25th Anniversary Parliamentary Reception



Peter Ainsworth MP



Ben Bradshaw MP



Present & Former Chairs & Directors of Link



Peter Melchett



Hilary Allison



Link Chair & staff

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