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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.”*



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

Q2 Report April – June 2004

Letter from the Chair...

Dear Members,

The second quarter of 2004 has been a time of significant announcements from Defra, with Margaret Beckett announcing the proposals for a new Integrated Agency – to be confirmed by an Act in 2005/06. Many of Link's concerns were addressed, though there will be a need for Link members to keep a watching brief on this and work together in the future. This quarter also saw the Planning Bill become an Act – due to concerted efforts of Link members the “sustainable development” clause was strengthened, and this is already having an effect on planners. Thanks to all those members who put such a lot of energy into this.

Link's marine campaign continues to gather pace. Many Link members contributed to a letter to *The Times* which coincided with Defra's publication of the Review of Marine Nature Conservation. The letter got good coverage elsewhere in the media and is continuing to provoke dialogue with other marine interests.

We are planning ahead for 2005, so I am keen that you respond to the annual questionnaire about the current working groups, and also please let us know if there are new issues which you want to work on through Link. There isn't any spare capacity at the moment, but we need to know if there are important issues where working through Link would make the difference so we can reprioritise resources if necessary.

It is Link's 25th anniversary next year; plans for an event are already shaping up. We'd like to use the event not just to look back on past successes, but to look forward – what do we want to have achieved in the next 25 years? With climate change having cumulatively greater impacts, it will be a tough challenge.

Progress is being made on the necessary steps for Link to become a charity; we'll be holding an EGM soon to consider this in detail. Invitations will be sent to all Link reps and we are keen for you to come along and discuss this important development in more detail.

Finally I am very sad to report that our hard-working and highly effective Director, Pippa, is leaving at the end of September to work at the Countryside Agency. We hope the new agency, when it is launched, will be more integrated as a result! We have already started the recruitment process to find her successor whom we hope to have in post as soon as possible. We will of course be having a party to say goodbye to Pippa – invitations will be sent out soon and I hope to see you there.

Best wishes

Hilary Allison

Working Groups

Farming and Rural Development WG

The FRD group is currently preparing a response to the consultation on cross compliance and Good Agricultural & Environmental Condition (GAEC) and has continued to work on CAP reform. Concerns remain over the impact of the Single Payment upon traditional orchards. The group has corresponded with Lord Whitty, Minister for Farming, Food and Sustainable Energy, and wrote to Franz Fischler, European Commissioner for Agriculture and Fisheries. The group are hopeful that Defra will be able to define "grazeable orchards" so that they can be included within the Single Payment scheme.

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.

A blue-sky day was held in June to discuss the group's future direction, including aims and objectives for the next 2-3 years. This was very useful – the group are now working on developing initial innovative thoughts into clear propositions.

Meetings

5th April – Bovine TB meeting
26th April – Working Group meeting
27th April – Agri-environment Steering Group meeting
30th April – CAP reform stakeholders' meeting
28th May – CAP reform stakeholders' meeting
25th June – CAP reform stakeholders' meeting

Woodland subgroup

The Woodland group continues to operate virtually.

Land Use Planning WG

In April, the Land Use Planning group sent a briefing to Planning Minister Keith Hill setting out the importance of local countryside designations, in response to the recommendation in the draft PPS7 that such designations be abolished. A reply has since been received from the Minister but did little to ease concerns, and the group will consider further work on this issue at their next meeting on 21st July.

A response to the consultation on PPS1 was submitted by the group in May, supported by 17 member organisations. The response expressed concern at the over-emphasis of the economic, compared to the social and environmental objectives of sustainable development in the PPS. The response also suggested that policies on good design, energy efficiency, better resource use and use of alternative materials should be strengthened.

The Planning & Compulsory Purchase Bill was passed on 12th May, having undergone a number of amendments including a Government concession on the wording of the Sustainable Development clause. Although slightly less strong than the wording suggested by Link, the amended clause does mean that it would be difficult for the planned system to endorse 'unsustainable development'. The group will now work on a guidance document for Planning Authorities on how to implement the changes brought about by the Planning & Compulsory Purchase Act.

Meetings

28th April – Working Group meeting

Minerals subgroup

The Minerals group continues to await the release of MPS1 for

consultation, which is now expected in mid-July, ahead of the summer recess. The group intends to meet with the Planning Officers Society during the consultation period to exchange information and discuss ideas. The group also met with Defra in April to discuss the future direction of the ALSF, and will be participating in Defra's new marine and terrestrial aggregates steering groups.

A useful and well-attended event on marine aggregates extraction was recently held by Marinet (the Maritime Information Network, a coalition of local FOE groups) in the House of Lords. Presentations were made by Stephen Eades of Marinet, Lisa Browning of the Wildlife Trusts and Kevin Seaman of BMAPA (British Marine Aggregate Producers Association), and followed by an in-depth question and answer session.

The Chair of the Minerals group, Jill Hatcher, recently moved on from her role at CPRE and stepped down as Chair. All at Link wish her the best for the future.

Meetings

23rd April – Meeting with Defra
12th May – Marinet Marine Aggregate debate
7th June – Living with Minerals event

PPS9 subgroup

The PPS9 group recently wrote to Keith Hill MP, Minister for Housing & Planning, providing comments ahead of the release of the consultation draft of PPS9, which were also in part prompted by PPS1. It is hoped that the draft PPS9 will be released for consultation ahead of the summer recess, though some parties suggest it is more likely publication will now occur in September. The group has also been invited to provide comments on the draft Good Practice Guidance that will accompany the

Working Groups & Task Forces

PPS, and will meet with English Nature to discuss this in July.

Wildlife and Trade WG

The Wildlife and Trade group is currently working towards CITES CoP13 in Thailand, in October 2004. The group met with Defra and the Sustainable Users Network (SUN) on 24th June to discuss the various proposed resolutions and amendments to the appendices, which can be viewed on the CITES website <http://www.cites.org/eng/cop/index.shtml>. A meeting with Elliot Morley MP has been scheduled for 20th July to discuss this.

Annie Smith is to represent Link members on the UK delegation to CoP13. The delegation will also include a representative of SUN.

Meetings

6th April – Working Group Meeting
24th June – Meeting with Defra and SUN

Whales subgroup

Despite the publication of a report¹ suggesting that whaling could have serious impacts on a country's whale watching industry, in early June Iceland announced its intention to kill 25 minke whales in 2004. This represents a major reduction to the threatened programme which would have meant killing hundreds of minke, sei and fin whales, but Link members continue to call for a total end to this 'scientific' whaling programme.

Group members will be occupied for most of July by this year's IWC meeting in Sorrento, Italy, where there is real concern that the pro-whaling nations could be in simple majority for the first time

in many years. Two members of the Whale Group will be acting as NGO representatives on the UK delegation. For more information on this year's IWC meeting see <http://www.iwcoffice.org/meetings/meeting2004.htm>.

The group is also concerned about offshore oil and gas developments at Sakhalin which threaten a critically endangered grey whale population, and is urging the UK government to advise against UK and European funding for the project.

Work has been taken forward by a sub-group on a campaign for a proper, public investigation of the effects on cetaceans of a sonar system used by the UK. Over recent weeks the Whale group has written to Ministers in the MOD and Defra to call for a moratorium on the further development of Sonar 2087, at least until a public investigation has been possible into the impacts of the system on marine wildlife and the way in which these impacts are addressed. Sea trials of Sonar 2087 took place in the North West approaches between 9th and 14th June.

Meetings

5th May – Whales Sonar meeting
10th June – Subgroup meeting
16th June – Whaling Forum

Biodiversity TF

During the second quarter of 2004 the work of the Biodiversity Task Force (BTF) was principally focused on preparations for the launch of the Biodiversity Manifesto, "Sustaining Biodiversity: revitalising the Biodiversity Action Plan process." The launch was held on 17th June in the House of Commons with the Minister for Nature Conservation and Fisheries, Ben Bradshaw, Mark Avery, Director of Conservation for the RSPB, Fiona Reynolds, Director General of the National Trust, and the Rt Rev John Oliver, former Bishop

of Hereford, as speakers. Peter Ainsworth MP, Chair of the Environmental Audit Committee, chaired the event. It is hoped the document will reinvigorate interest in biodiversity and emphasise the importance of biodiversity in sustainable development. The Manifesto was also included within delegate packs at the UK Biodiversity Partnership meeting in Cardiff on 21/22 June, where its recommendations formed the basis of a presentation by the BTF Chair Martin Harper.

To feed into the revision of targets taking place as part of the 2005 BAP review, members of the BTF are also considering how, in practice, targets can reflect favourable conservation status (in the context of the Habitats Directive). Through BRIG (the Biodiversity Reporting and Information Group) and its sub-groups, Link members continue to contribute towards the review, for which a timetable will now be produced in response to requests from NGO representatives. In addition, the BTF plans to hold a seminar on environmental change in August, to consider the implications of climate change for setting conservation priorities and targets.

Meetings

4th May – Task Force meeting
17th June – Biodiversity Manifesto launch

Marine TF

The Marine Task Force (MTF) held a successful event in Portcullis House on 25th May, when 32 MPs came to have their photos taken to publicise their support for EDM 171 which calls on the government to 'introduce, at the earliest opportunity, comprehensive legislation to protect and manage the marine environment in an integrated and sustainable manner'. The MPs were provided with a suggested press release (along with their photos) and encouraged to seek

¹ Parsons, ECM & Rawles, C (2003) The Resumption of Whaling by Iceland and the Potential Negative Impact in the Icelandic Whale-Watching Market. *Current Issues in Tourism* 6 (5), pp. 444-448.

Task Forces

publicity around World Oceans Day (8th June). Representatives of the MTF also had a very positive meeting with the Environment Minister, Elliot Morley MP, on 26th May. Mr Morley expressed his support for comprehensive marine legislation and emphasised the importance of demonstrating the benefits this would bring to sectors other than nature conservation.

Also in May, Sharon Thompson of the RSPB gave a presentation on marine legislation on Link's behalf, alongside speakers from Defra and EN, to a meeting of the Wildlife and Conservation All Party Parliamentary Group. The MTF has begun to develop plans for a mass lobby of parliament.

The Review of Marine Nature Conservation concluded in June, and its report to Government will be published during July. Link representatives had engaged with the process throughout, and worked hard to shape the report.

The MTF's chair, Stuart Singleton-White, moved on from WWF and therefore the MTF at the end of June. All at Link wish him the very best for his future campaigning with Plan International.

Meetings

7th April – Task Force meeting
14th May – Task Force meeting
26th May – Meeting with Elliot Morley MP

Bycatch subgroup

Many members of the Link Bycatch group attended the ASCOBANS Advisory Committee meeting in Poland.

The final text of the EU Bycatch Regulation is now available at http://europa.eu.int/eur-lex/en/refdoc/L_150/L_2004150EN_1.pdf. The group met on 10th June to consider how to influence the UK implementation of the very disappointing EU regulation, and agreed to produce a set of

demands (beyond the requirements of the regulation) which the UK government would need to fulfil to significantly reduce cetacean bycatch in UK waters.

Meetings

10th June – Subgroup meeting

Water TF

The Water Task Force has been invited to contribute to Defra's Regulatory Impact Assessment stakeholder group to deal with the periodic review environmental investment programme, with Link representatives attending the first meeting on 8th June.

The Task Force welcomed the Defra consultation on diffuse pollution on the 18th June. A Link statement has been prepared. A joint response to the current consultation on British Waterways will be submitted.

Meetings

7th May – Task Force meeting

Access of Motorised Vehicles in the Countryside

Following the first meeting in March, the group responded to the Defra consultation on the Use of Mechanically Propelled Vehicles on Rights of Way, 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.

Meetings

11th May – Task Force meeting

Defra's Modernisation Review

A Link letter raising issues of the duties of the integrated agency, its regional presence and resources has been sent to Defra. An announcement by Margaret Beckett on the new Integrated Agency was expected later in June.

Sustainable Development

Government recently launched a consultation on sustainable development. A Link response to this is currently being produced.

Sister Links



Network for Organisations interested in the Environment

Northern Ireland Environment Link (NIEL)

NIEL's project on rural change, Cultivating Creativity, has been a major task for the quarter due to the organisation of the publicity document, event and touring exhibition. A big success from artistic, rural development and environmental perspectives, the project offers a constructive way forward to help communities influence policy in a time of change.

Also regarding rural development, NIEL held a conference on Rural Futures looking at varying perspectives of the countryside. NIEL continues to develop its work in assisting rural communities with environmental projects.

The Strategic Review continues, with ever more delays, but the plan (nearly four years in development) nears completion and news on future funding is expected in August. Task forces on Freshwater and Marine issues are being set up and are already having an input to government policy.

The chief activity on the NGO front in Northern Ireland is action toward promoting a revision of structures for environmental protection. A major research report was launched at a conference in May, a public consultation exercise has just finished and is now being analysed, whilst NIEL itself is developing an 'advocacy strategy' to try to bring about the structural changes deemed necessary to deliver proper protection of the environment.



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.

It has been announced that over the next 18 months an 'Environment Strategy for Wales' will be produced, with three representatives from WEL part of the Reference Group. Furthermore, with thanks to the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds, the Chair of WEL, Tony Prater, will be seconded one day per week to work with the Strategy Team (a management and drafting group).

At this year's annual general meeting WEL decided to revamp their constitution. Building on last year's success of raising the profile of WEL, the strategic objectives this year will centre more on raising the profile of the 'environment'. It was also decided that supported working groups for 2004/2005 will work on Agriculture, Planning, and the Wales Environment Strategy. Additional member led groups covering Health and the Environment, the Historic Environment and the Marine Environment were approved, though in all cases a Chair needs to be found and a work programme agreed for the coming year.



Scottish Environment Link (SEL)

A great success of the quarter has been the new Nature legislation for Scotland, greeted with satisfaction by Scottish Environment Link and its members who worked extremely hard towards its passage. Meetings with Ministers are ongoing regarding planning and marine matters, and it is hoped that discussions of energy issues will soon be forthcoming.

SEL, along with others in the voluntary sector, are responding to the draft Charities Bill for Scotland, paying particular attention to the issues of public benefit, independence, dual regulation and the regulator advisory role.

The Agriculture Task Force is working hard on a myriad of SEERAD stakeholder groups on the detail of CAP reform; decisions on prescriptions, policies and funding are due in September. The Historic Environment TF launched its lobbying document, 'The Bigger Picture,' in June. The launch of the new Biodiversity 'manifesto' is planned for the 7th September.

However, the main focus of SEL efforts remains with raising public and political awareness of the environment. SEL bodies are evaluating the impact of the European election leg of their **everyone** campaign and running a short campaign now on Third Party Right of Appeal in the lead up to new planning legislation expected to start through Holyrood in the autumn. Campaigning – still under the **everyone** banner – around the Marine Environment is due to take off in September and planning is beginning shortly for

Sister Links

campaign activities for 2005 including environmental priorities for Scotland in relation to the Westminster elections and potentially the G8 Gleneagles meeting.

Congress 2004, for members and others, is planned for November and will include 'blue sky' thinking of Scottish NGO aspirations for the next 4-5 years, and the resource availability for these aspirations.

Finally, SEL is delighted to have on board Fred Edwards as its new President: Fred is a full-time volunteer worker with a strong interest in environmental issues, social justice and international development.

News from the WCL Secretariat

Management Committee Meeting

The second Management Committee Meeting of 2004 was held on 30th June. Issues discussed included quarterly accounts, the annual accounts and report for 2003, membership subscriptions & donations, fundraising, Link's application for Charity status, office accommodation and a communications strategy for Link.

Other Link news...

WCL was delighted to recruit two new volunteers in Q2. Alex Connor has been working on the Link response to *Taking it on – The UK Sustainable Development Strategy* and will be providing policy support to the Water Task Force in the coming months. Asha Bobb-Semple, a MSc student from LSE, has been providing support to the Land Use Planning Working Group, particularly with regard to the briefing on RSSs and LDFs. The Secretariat wish to welcome these new volunteers to Link, and

to pass on continued thanks to long-term volunteer Sarah Eaton.

WCL Email Policy

The Secretariat request that all members take note of WCL's email policy:

On becoming a member of Wildlife & Countryside Link, organisations give their permission to Link to share their contact details with the rest of the Link membership and other relevant parties (e.g. government departments & parliamentarians). This includes the addition of staff work email addresses on distribution lists which will be shared with Link members and others. Information will not be disclosed to commercial operations.

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)