

IN THIS ISSUE:

- 1** Letter from the Chair
- 2** WORKING GROUPS
Farming & Rural
Development WG
Land Use Planning WG
Minerals SG
PPS9 SG
Wildlife & Trade WG
- 3** WORKING GROUPS &
TASK FORCES
Whales SG
Biodiversity TF
- 4** TASK FORCES
Marine TF
Bycatch SG
Water TF
Access of Motorised
Vehicles in the
Countryside TF
- 5** TASK FORCES &
SISTER LINKS
- 6** SISTER LINKS
- 7** NEWS FROM THE LINK
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

Wildlife & Countryside Link is a
registered charity (No. 1107460)
and a company limited by
guarantee (No. 3889519)

Q2 Report April - June 2005

Letter from the Chair...

Dear Members

This quarter's activity has focused mainly upon legislation, both promised and in progress. Most attention has been on the progress through the House of Commons of the Natural Environment and Rural Communities (NERC) Bill which, subject to parliamentary agreement, will establish Natural England. The Bill also contained other areas of interest to Link members, including a number of wildlife provisions arising from the Part 1 review of the Wildlife and Countryside Act, as well as legislation relating to Rights of Way. The Commons Bill was also introduced to the House of Lords towards the end of the quarter which Link will continue to follow as it progresses through parliament.

During the quarter, Link also welcomed the inclusion of the Draft Marine Bill in the Queen's Speech legislative programme, which Link's Marine Task Force has been actively campaigning on for some time. This campaign continues, with focus now moving to influence the content of the Draft Bill over the next few months. In the meantime, Link is continuing to ensure the level of awareness is raised both amongst parliamentarians and also the general public, with the presentation of 165,000 pledges of support for new marine legislation to the Prime Minister on World Oceans Day in June by a coalition of Link members.

In other areas Link has been similarly busy. Martin Harper, the Biodiversity Task Force's Chair, represented Link at the UK Biodiversity Conference, giving a well-received presentation on the 2010 target entitled "Halting Biodiversity Loss: the five year challenge". June also saw the 57th meeting of the International Whaling Commission in Korea, which has demanded the focus of Link Whale group members for some time, with Link providing the UK Government with detailed comments on the agenda.

On the staff front, this quarter we said a temporary goodbye to Link's Policy and Campaigns Co-ordinator Annie Smith who is on secondment to RSPB until early 2006. Helen Meech has taken over Annie's role in the meantime and we welcomed Jodie Bettis as Link's new Information and Office Co-ordinator. We also said a collective goodbye to Tim Sands of the Wildlife Trusts who has been associated with Link for all of its 25 years and who is off to enjoy an active retirement.

Best wishes

Hilary Allison

Working Groups

Farming and Rural Development Working Group

The Farming & Rural Development group met for a workshop on the future of agricultural funding and the RDR 2007-2013 on the 21st April, which was facilitated by Vicki Swales of IEEP and attended by Alastair Rutherford of EN and also Lisa Schneidau, convenor of Scottish Environment LINK's Agricultural task force, to discuss the situation in Scotland. A follow up meeting was held on 23rd May to discuss the next steps for Link at which a priority list of activities was decided upon for the groups work over the next year. Link has also been invited to sit on the Steering Group to comment on and steer the draft Regulatory Impact Assessment for the Rural Development Regulation 2007-2013. The first meeting took place on 22nd June and was attended by Link representative, John Cousins.

Woodland subgroup

The Woodland group continues to operate virtually. The group has recently decided that due to the large number of Link members with their own place on the England Forestry Forum, the Link place should on this occasion be given up. The Woodland Trust will take on the responsibility of reporting back to those Link members in the group who have not secured a seat.

Land Use Planning Working Group

The Land Use Planning group is currently 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 met on 10th May to discuss this briefing, as well as the Planning Inspectorate consultation on the "*Framework for assessing soundness and focusing representations on Development Plan Documents and Statements of Community Involvement*", to which a Link response was submitted on 28th May.

The Land Use Planning group also held a workshop on spatial planning and climate change on 20th June to discuss proposals to call for a planning policy statement on climate change. As a result of this workshop, the group has written to John Prescott and Margaret Beckett urging them to take urgent action to refocus the new planning framework to deal comprehensively with climate change.

Minerals subgroup

Following the submission of a Link response to the consultation on draft MPS1 in February, the Minerals group was pleased to note that paragraph 4 of the recently published MPS2 states that MPAs should aim to 'minimise production of waste and to

encourage efficient use of materials, including appropriate use of high-quality materials, and recycling of waste', and hopes that MPS1 will contain similarly strong wording. The Minerals group also intends to respond to the draft annexes of MPS1 which are expected to be published for consultation before the summer recess.

PPS9 subgroup

The PPS9 group submitted a joint response to the consultation on draft PPS9 and the accompanying legal circular in December with sign-up from 16 organisations. Early in 2005 the group inputted final comments and case studies to English Nature for the Good Practice Guidance that will accompany the final PPS and as agreed at Link's AGM last December, any further work on PPS9 will now be taken forward through the wider Land Use Planning group.

Wildlife and Trade Working Group

The Wildlife & Trade Working Group submitted a Link response to Defra's consultation on the COTES Regulations, which will implement the increased penalties allowed under the Criminal Justice Act 2004. The group continues to monitor the EU's implementation of the decisions made at CITES CoP13 in October 2004 and continues to engage closely with the UK CITES authorities

Working Groups & Task Forces

on forthcoming issues, including ways in which to optimise the government delegation/NGO representative relationship for the next CoP. The last meeting of the Wildlife and Trade Group occurred on June 10th which discussed upcoming meetings, the EU Ban on Import of Wild Birds and upcoming consultations. Link also met with JNCC staff on 16th June to discuss Wildlife and Trade issues.

Whale subgroup

Link provided the UK government with detailed comments on the provisional annotated agenda for the June 2005 International Whaling Commission meeting (IWC57) and the group attended the Consultative Whaling Forum meeting on 18th May to discuss these comments with the UK's IWC commissioner and other members of the Defra team. Many of Link's Whale Group members attended the IWC meeting in Ulsan, Korea. Despite the last minute addition of member states, pro-whaling countries failed to win key votes at this meeting. However, Japan has vowed to increase the number of whales killed as part of their 'scientific whaling' programme.

The Whale Group wrote to ministers to stress their ongoing concern regarding the Sakhalin II project and a delegation of Link members met with ECGD to discuss the Sakhalin project on 5th May.

John Frizell, Chair of the Whale Group, attended the IUCN workshop held in Gland, Switzerland on 11th-12th May at which former members of the expert whale panel were also present, to help inform Sakhalin Energy and the Lender's decision-making following the company's response to the Independent Scientific Review Panel's (ISRP) report. The package of information from the lenders and the commencement of the Lenders disclosure period were expected in June however no further update has been provided on this timeline.

EDM 793, calling for a full and rigorous public review of the environmental impact of Sonar 2087 before further testing and deployment of Sonar 2087 is allowed to commence, was tabled on 28th February by Norman Baker MP and Andrew George MP on behalf of Link. The Link Whale group wrote to all MPs to encourage them to support the motion, which gathered over fifty signatures before Parliament was dissolved.

Unfortunately, letters written to the Times and Independent newspapers in May and June, calling for a public review of Sonar 2087's environmental impacts were not published. A delegation of Link members met the Defence Procurement Agency (DPA) and their environmental experts on 27th June. At this meeting it was confirmed that the next set of trials will begin in early July in the North West approaches of Scotland. If these trials are deemed successful (by the

DPA) Sonar 2087 will be deployed across the fleet.

Biodiversity Task Force

The Biodiversity Task Force (BTF) has submitted responses to both Defra's review of Part 1 of the Wildlife & Countryside Act, and to the consultation on the quinquennial review which proposes new species to be added to Schedules 5 and 8 of the Act. Representatives of the group also met with the European Wildlife Division at Defra to discuss the proposals arising from the Part 1 review that will be taken forward through the NERC Bill. The BTF will closely track the progress of this, and has produced briefings and amendments on certain wildlife provisions contained within Part 3 of the Bill.

The BTF met on 29th April to discuss a range of topics including Link's presentation on the 2010 target at the UK Biodiversity Conference in Bristol, the UK BAP Review, and the implementation of the England Biodiversity Strategy. The group also said a fond farewell to Tim Sands of The Wildlife Trusts who has now retired after over 40 years in nature conservation. All at Link would like to thank Tim for the huge contribution he has made to Link and the environment movement as a whole.

The BTF continues to contribute to the BAP review process and held a workshop to discuss this on 10th June. Link now intends to produce a statement on the BAP review

Task Forces

based upon the discussions held at this workshop.

Many representatives of the BTF attended the UK Biodiversity Conference in Bristol on 14 & 15 June themed “2010 target and beyond”. Martin Harper, the group’s Chair, gave a well-received presentation on the 2010 target entitled “Halting Biodiversity Loss: the five year challenge”.

Marine Task Force

Following the successful parliamentary lobby event on 9th March, the Marine Task Force (MTF) has continued to engage with a range of external stakeholders. The MTF met the Chamber of Shipping and BMAPA on 14th April, and group members have attended recent workshops on MPAs and a meeting of the Marine Spatial Planning Pilot Project Advisory Group.

The MTF was delighted to see a Draft Marine Bill included in the Government’s legislative programme accompanying the Queen’s Speech and has called on the Government to move quickly to bring forward a full bill. The group continues to campaign for the Marine Bill to include, among other things:

- Improved protection of marine wildlife sites and species, including stronger protection for nationally important marine wildlife sites;
- A planning system for the sea (known as marine spatial planning), allowing

co-ordinated, strategic decision-making about which marine areas should be prioritised for nature conservation, which for economic development (e.g. fishing, offshore energy development, aggregate dredging) and which for recreational activities;

- Reform of inshore fisheries.

On World Oceans Day (8th June) representatives of the MTF visited 10 Downing Street to present a series of petitions and pledges collected by MCS, RSPB, TWT, WDCCS and WWF calling for comprehensive legislation to protect the UK’s seas. The 165,000 pledges of support for new marine laws clearly demonstrate that the public see a Marine Bill as a real priority. An official response was received from Ben Bradshaw, Minister for Local Environment, Marine and Animal Welfare, which can be seen on Link’s website at www.wcl.org.uk.

The MTF has also recently met with Dave Bench, Head of the Marine Legislation Division at Defra, who gave a useful update on the progress of the Bill, and with Angela Moffat of English Nature to discuss their work on the Bill. The group also hopes to secure a meeting with the Minister Ben Bradshaw in the near future.

Bycatch subgroup

Ben Bradshaw, Minister for Local Environment, Marine & Animal Welfare, has been successful in requesting the EU Council of Ministers to review data regarding bycatch

of common dolphins, thus bringing this process forward at a faster pace than required by the EU Bycatch Regulations.

The bycatch group met on 23rd May to share information on groups’ current and planned work on bycatch and agreed to request a meeting with Ben Bradshaw to discuss bycatch issues, and to ask that he raises these issues with other EU member states during the UK Presidency.

Water TF

The Water Task Force recently submitted a Link response to the Environment Agency (EA) consultation on River Basin Management Planning. The group met on 25th May and discussed future work on river basin planning and on the EA characterisation process. Carrie Howard of RSPB also gave a useful presentation on the RSPB Wetland Vision project.

Access of Motorised Vehicles in the Countryside Task Force

The work of this group in the second quarter was focussed around the NERC Bill, with Part 6 of the Bill containing measures relevant to Rights of Way. The second reading of the Bill on 6th June focused heavily on Rights of Way issues and many MPs called for the commencement date of the legislation to be brought forward. Link prepared a briefing for the Committee stage on these Rights of Way provisions.

Task Forces & Sister Links

Renewable Obligation Certificate (ROC) Review 2005-06

A one-off workshop to discuss the Renewable Obligation Certificate (ROC) Review was held on 26th May. This helped to inform Link members' responses to the preliminary ROC consultation. The success of this workshop has prompted Link to consider holding another ROC workshop once the full consultation period has begun, and possibly preparing a Link response if there is sufficient interest.

Natural Environment and Rural Communities Bill

The Natural Environment and Rural Communities (NERC) Bill was introduced to the House of Commons on 19th May. Subsequently, Link held a meeting to discuss the Bill on 27th May which included a two-hour briefing session by English Nature staff on key issues of the NERC Bill, after which Link produced a briefing for all MPs, with sign on from 16 organisations. On 6th June the NERC Bill received its second reading in the House of Commons with Link being quoted by David Kidney during the proceedings.

The Standing Committee selected to examine the Bill was announced on 16th June and the first meeting was held on the 21st June. Link produced an overarching briefing supporting the formation of Natural England and the current wording of the general purpose. Separate

briefings were also prepared on certain clauses contained in Part 3 (wildlife provisions) of the Bill and Rights of Way provisions in Part 6 of the Bill.

Link also continues to regularly contribute to Defra's Natural England Stakeholder Group meetings, which will now be focusing on Natural England's Strategy.

Commons Bill

In late March the Farming & Biodiversity groups sent a letter in support of the Commons Bill to Alun Michael MP, stressing that parliamentary time should be secured for the Bill. The Commons Bill was included in the Queen's Speech and was subsequently introduced to the House of Lords on the 27th June.

A briefing session for Link members on the Commons Bill by English Nature staff will be held in August, when next steps for Link will be discussed.

Sister Links



Northern Ireland Environment Link (NIEL)

NIEL finally received a grant offer from the Environment and Heritage Service in March

2005 which will provide core funding for the next three years. Recruitment for additional staff has now been completed with the new Membership and Information Officer starting on 1st July and new Policy Officer starting on 1st August. NIEL will also be moving office in August.

Two major conferences have been held in the last quarter. The first launched a directory of resources for community projects known as 'Forging Links'. In addition, around 60 people attended the 'Northern Ireland's Environment – Past Present and Future' and Annual General Meeting which successfully launched NIEL's annual report and new logo, and held a debate on the past, present and future of the environment in Northern Ireland.

With regard to policy, NIEL's Director Sue Christie has been working with the NI government on the Sustainable Development Stakeholders' Forum (devising the Northern Ireland Sustainable Development Strategy) and on revising the Waste Management Strategy. Work themes for the coming year are Planning, Integration, the EPA, Sustainable Development and Water.

NIEL is currently campaigning for an integrated approach to the environment and for an independent NI Environmental Protection Agency. A Ministerial announcement on an independent review regarding the roles and functions of this is expected very soon.



Wales Environment Link (WEL)

Marc Welsh, Director of WEL will be leaving to take up postgraduate study at the University of Aberystwyth in September. WEL are currently recruiting a new Director.

WEL's AGM was held on 6th July and agreed the broad objectives for the coming year and began to look forward to the next major work plan review in 2006. The following working groups were agreed for the coming year:

- Wales Environment Strategy
- Planning
- Agriculture
- Health and Environment (member-led)
- Marine (member-led)
- Funding

WEL are considering how they will seek to influence the debate during the forthcoming 2007 Assembly elections, possibly moving to more of an "everyone" style campaign. As a precursor to this work they will be reviewing their 15 policy position statements over the summer.

On top of this WEL will be actively seeking new members, particularly those "national" organisations that

have a practical projects based presence in Wales but are yet to establish an obvious policy profile in the country.

Politically, Wales is going through interesting times. The Assembly is gradually gaining more powers, though the debate on how many and what for is beginning to pick up steam. For example it has just gained new powers over transport, and is in the process of scrapping a number of quangos.

The new Governance of Wales Bill has also been issued as a White paper; this is likely to introduce a fast tracking of Welsh legislation process, but not much by way of substantial transfer of powers.

At the same time the nature of the Assembly government has changed (as a result of the UK elections) with the Labour administration now a minority government in the Assembly.



LINK

Scottish Environment Link (SEL)

SEL are currently undergoing a strategic review which will develop broad objectives for the organisation through until 2009. The outcome of this review will be published at the end of October 2005.

Policy priorities are now being developed by members and task forces for a campaign which SEL will deliver for the 2007 Holyrood elections, with key 'asks' for Scotland's politicians in the period 2007 to 2011.

At present, the Strategic Environment Assessment Bill is going through the Scottish Parliament; SEL are briefing and following progress. A Scottish planning bill is due, for which the White Paper just published outlines the Executive's thinking; very disappointingly, the notion of a third party right of appeal is not included; SEL members will be actively campaigning for real rights to be enshrined in the new legislation.

SEL are preparing for their autumn members' congress which has helped to develop synergy in the past three years. An open, inspirational Friday will be followed by workshops on the Saturday with a general focus on effective campaigning. SEL also intends to hold a twenty year commemorative dinner probably in the autumn of 2005.

In the wake of this year's first and very popular Scottish Environment Week, plans are afoot for a follow up in February 2006 – a week of events designed to profile and celebrate Scotland's environment with NGOs, community groups, public and decision-makers.

News from the Link Secretariat

Management Committee Meeting

The second Management Committee meeting of 2005 was held on 22nd June. Issues discussed included the financial accounts for this second quarter, the successful bid by Helen Meech to secure funding from the Esmée Fairbairn Foundation, and plans for Link's 25 year Anniversary celebrations. Also on the agenda was a further clarification of the Associate Membership rules, Link's Health & Safety Policy and the launch of Link's Marine Bill Bulletin.

Other Link news...

On 3rd May, Annie Smith, Link's Policy and Campaigns Co-ordinator, began her secondment at RSPB as Marine Policy Officer, covering for Sharon Thompson whilst she is seconded to Defra's Marine Bill team. Helen Meech was promoted to Policy and Campaigns Co-ordinator and Jodie Bettis has been recruited to fill the Information and Office Co-ordinator position during the secondment period.

Link has secured a significant grant from the Esmée Fairbairn Foundation, part of which will be spent on our 25 year Anniversary celebrations planned for the autumn.

Link has now introduced an Associate Membership scheme in addition to Full Membership, which is aimed at smaller organisations to give them a taster of full

membership. Further information on Associate Membership can be found at: www.wcl.org.uk/Associate%20Membership.htm

WORKING GROUPS

Farming and Rural Development

Chair: John Cousins, TWT
Vice Chair: Ian Woodhurst, CPRE
Sec: Alexia Wellbelove

Woodland Subgroup:

Chair: Nick Collinson, WT
Sec: Alexia Wellbelove

Land Use Planning

Chair: Henry Oliver, CPRE
Sec: Helen Meech

Minerals Subgroup:

Chair: Ruth Chambers, CNP
Sec: Helen Meech

Wildlife and Trade

Chair: Jenny Hawley, IFAW
Vice Chair: Cathy Williamson, WDCS
Sec: Alexia Wellbelove

Whales Subgroup:

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

TASK FORCES

Access of Motorised Vehicles in the Countryside

Chair: Donna O'Brien, CNP
Sec: Alexia Wellbelove

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

Bycatch Subgroup:

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

Water Policy and Legislation

Chair: Sarah Oppenheimer, RSPB
Vice Chair: Phil Burston, RSPB
Sec: Helen Meech