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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.”*



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Q3 Report July - September 2005

Letter from the Chair...

Dear Members

The last quarter has seen a period for Link where many groups have been preparing for forthcoming consultations and events later in the year.

In particular, the Marine Task Force has been busily working to influence key partners as Defra begin the policy consultations which will feed into the draft Marine Bill. This is a key period for Link to influence the Bill and all involved have dedicated a substantial amount of time to numerous meetings and the production of a series of working papers and bulletins. These have been circulated to a broad audience and continue to be extremely well received. This marks only the beginning of what will be a very busy few months for Link's Marine Task Force.

This quarter has also seen two new members join Link – so a warm welcome to the Association of Rivers Trusts and the Hawk and Owl Trust – Link's 36th and 37th members.

Over the next few months Link will be focusing on celebrating its 25th anniversary which falls this year, through a parliamentary reception in November and the launch of a publication highlighting the contribution Link has made to the sector over the past 25 years (more on this in the next quarterly report). In addition, Link will be holding its AGM in London on 9th December which we hope many of you will be able to attend.

Best wishes

Hilary Allison

Working Groups

Farming and Rural Development WG

The FRD group met on 31st August when Vicki Swales from IEEP gave an update of the Assured Food Standards scheme and Lucy Bjorck from RSPB gave a briefing on bioenergy. Other issues discussed included cross compliance, set aside and the voluntary initiative on pesticides. Concerns were also raised around the Agri-Environment Steering Group and the future of Farm Environment Plans. The group has written to Defra on these points and is preparing Link position statements on bioenergy and GM crops.

The meeting on the 31st August also included a joint session with the Land Use Policy Group's Rural Affairs Group (RAG), where it was agreed that information sharing and communication would be done on a more regular basis in the future, in addition to twice yearly meetings of Link and RAG. Link also sits on the Rural Development Regulation 2007-2013 Steering Group which is currently working on the draft of the Regulatory Impact Assessment. The first meeting took place on 22nd June and was attended by Link representative John Cousins.

A subgroup of the FRD group will meet in October to discuss Link's vision of the Common Agricultural Policy and the next steps for a Link strategy on proposed CAP reforms whilst the next FRD group meeting is scheduled for November.

Woodland subgroup

During the quarter Link commented on the review of the

Forestry Biodiversity Guidelines. Link was also represented on the Sustaining England's Woodlands Steering Group and the Implementation Group of the forest industries sustainability strategy 'Naturally Wood'. Link will also have a representative on the England Forestry Strategy review Steering Group due to first meet in the next quarter. The Woodland group will continue to operate virtually.

Land Use Planning WG

It was agreed at the Land Use Planning (LUP) Group workshop on climate change on the 20th June that spatial planning has a major and positive contribution to make, both in promoting lifestyles that reduce emissions and in facilitating a countryside that is resilient to the effects of climate change. A Link letter was sent to the Deputy Prime Minister John Prescott and Secretary of State Margaret Beckett, calling on them to take urgent action on this issue. A response was received from the office of the Secretary of State directing Link to the ODPM. The group has now agreed to seek a meeting with the Minister for Climate Change, Elliot Morley on this matter.

The LUP Group is also continuing work on a spatial planning briefing intended to assist local authorities and others implement the changes brought about by the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004. This was discussed at the meeting on the 25th August along with the final version of PPS9 published on 16th August. The group also discussed the PPS3/Barker Review, the Planning for Housing Provision consultation, the Draft Green

Belt Direction consultation, and planning and water including the review of PPS25. A Link response was submitted to the ODPM Planning for Housing Provision consultation in September and can be downloaded from our website.

Minerals subgroup

The Minerals group met on 9th September to discuss the Link response to the consultation paper on Annexes to Minerals Policy Statement 1: Planning and minerals (MPS1). This consultation seeks comments on four draft annexes to this minerals policy statement and focuses on planning matters specific to the supply of aggregates, brick clay, building & roofing stone, and oil & gas. The deadline for comments is 31st October 2005.

Wildlife and Trade WG

Group representatives met with Defra on the 20th July to discuss the recent meeting of the CITES Standing Committee, Article 8.2 and other upcoming issues. There is concern that the transfer of CITES animal and plant licensing and bird registration from Defra's Global Wildlife Division (GWD) to the State Veterinary Service (SVS) (a Defra executive agency from April 2005), and the transfer of the Wildlife Inspectorate either to the SVS or to the Rural Development Service (RDS) may affect the important connection between the policy and licensing functions. Link will continue to work towards ensuring that the same high level of service is retained should these licensing responsibilities be transferred out of Defra.

Working Groups & Task Forces

The group's Chair, Jenny Hawley, left IFAW on the 2nd September to pursue postgraduate studies at the University of East Anglia. Rob Atkinson from RSPCA has been confirmed as the new Chair of the group. Many thanks go to Jenny for all her excellent work chairing the group over the past two years. The next meeting will take place on the 4th October when the Link response to the consultation on the use of powers under Article 8.2 (to prohibit the keeping of certain CITES specimens) will be discussed.

Whales subgroup

Following the IWC meeting in June, the Whales sub group has had a quieter period, although the group continues to work on Sonar 2087 and the Sakhalin II project. There remain a number of concerns from potential lenders on the Sakhalin II project. In order to address these questions an additional meeting of the former ISRP (expert whale panel) was convened in September by potential lenders to review the adequacy of Sakhalin Energy's mitigation planning.

Funding for the Sakhalin II project has still not been confirmed and the package of information from the Lenders and the commencement of the Lenders disclosure period have not yet been announced.

Link is working with an international coalition of NGOs which wrote to the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development (EBRD) after the September meeting, urging them to protect their integrity and reputation by not investing in the Sakhalin II Project. A letter from Link has also been

sent to Ministers in Defra, DfID and the DTI, reiterating the groups continued concerns. In response, it has been suggested that a long-term advisory body to monitor and advise on Western Gray Whale protection be set up.

Biodiversity TF

The Biodiversity Task Force (BTF) continues to contribute to the BAP review process and convened a workshop on this on the 10th June, with further discussion held at the Task Force meeting on the 12th July. The group met again on the 15th September to continue the development of a Link statement on the BAP review and to share thoughts on the recent UK Biodiversity Partnership conference. The advocacy of the 2010 target and a review of the recommendations within the Link "Sustaining Biodiversity" report were also discussed and preparations made for upcoming meetings of the UK Biodiversity Partnership Standing Committee and the England Biodiversity Group.

The BTF has also continued to monitor the provisions arising from the review of Part 1 of the Wildlife and Countryside Act which will be taken forward through the NERC Bill. The BTF wrote to Defra on the proposed Government amendment to extend the offence of recklessness in relation to Schedules 1 (rare birds), 5 (protected animals) and 8 (protected plants) of the Wildlife and Countryside Act and gave examples of how the recklessness clause might be applied. Link also produced two briefings on certain wildlife provisions within Part 3 of the

Bill, which are available for download from our website.

Marine TF

A subgroup of the Marine Task Force (MTF) met to review Link's marine species policy paper on the 6th June and to discuss the current BAP Review with Nikki Chapman of JNCC. A wider policy meeting was held on the 7th June where the progress on updating Link's other policy papers was discussed.

The group also held meetings in June with Angela Moffat of English Nature, and Dave Bench, Head of the Marine Legislation Division at Defra, to discuss the development of the draft Marine Bill. Meetings for both the campaign and policy arms of the MTF were held on the 14th and 20th July respectively, where plans were made to continue to meet with a range of external stakeholders.

The MTF has developed 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 MPAs, MSP, marine biodiversity and inshore fisheries. The group has also met with a range of stakeholders and decision-makers within government, including representatives from Defra, DTI and the Environment Agency. On the 12th September, members of the MTF took Ben Bradshaw, the Minister responsible for the Marine Bill, on a boat trip from Exmouth into Lyme Bay to show him the local wildlife and coastline. A number of Link members also attended Defra's

Task Forces

Marine Bill Forum on September 26th.

The first of a series of Link Marine Bulletins was published on 3rd August, entitled "A Future for our Seas – What the Marine Bill must contain" and was circulated to a variety of stakeholders via the CMS network. The second was published on 9th September, entitled "Biodiversity Protection and Conservation in the Marine Environment". All published bulletins are available for download from our website.

Bycatch subgroup

The bycatch group wrote to Ben Bradshaw on 11th July seeking a meeting to discuss bycatch and to ask that he raises this issue with other EU member states during the UK Presidency, but a response has still not been received. The next meeting is scheduled for 6th October and will discuss EU Pinger regulations, inshore fisheries, ASCOBANS, and members' current and planned work on bycatch.

Water TF

The Water Task Force met on 19th August to discuss the Flooding Directive and EU Internet consultation, UK water resources and the drought situation, agricultural diffuse pollution, and River Basin Planning. The group submitted a Link response to the EA consultation on River Basin Management Planning, which is available for download from our website. A letter regarding the Final Environment Agency Strategy for River Basin Planning was sent to Barbara Young, Chief Executive of the Environment Agency, and it is expected that the final River

Basin Planning document will be published by EA in December 2005.

Access of Motorised Vehicles in the Countryside

The group's current focus is on Part 6 of the NERC Bill which contains measures relevant to Rights of Way. The second reading of the Bill on the 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 with regard to the Rights of Way provisions in Part 6 of the Bill which is available for download from our website.

Natural Environment and Rural Communities (NERC) Bill

The Standing Committee considering the NERC Bill met between the 21st June and 5th July and the third reading/report stage took place on Tuesday 11th October. The amended NERC Bill can be downloaded from the Defra website.

Link produced an overarching briefing supporting the formation of Natural England (NE) and the current wording of the general purpose. In addition, a further two briefings on certain clauses contained in Part 3 (wildlife provisions) and Part 6 (Rights of Way) of the Bill are available for download from our website.

The draft strategy for NE was released for consultation during the quarter and a Link response submitted with sign up from 16 organisations. The draft strategy is intended to describe NE's strategic direction and approach and will form part of the Chair and Chief Executive's

handover package once appointed. Further details and consultation is expected on specific measures, outputs and processes of NE at a later date.

Link attended Defra's NE Stakeholder Group meetings in June and September. The June meeting focused on the cross-cutting issue of governance and the next steps in the development of NE's strategy whilst in September the draft strategy for NE was discussed in detail.

Commons Bill

The First Reading of the Bill took place in the House of Lords on the 27th June and the Second Reading was held on the 20th July. The Grand Committee is expected to meet on Tuesday 25th October. On the 2nd August, a very useful briefing session for Link members on the Commons Bill was held by English Nature staff. Individual Link members continue to hold meetings with Defra throughout the summer recess period, with next steps for Link being decided upon at the end of September based upon the outcome of these meetings.



Sister Links



Northern Ireland Environment Link (NIEL)

NIEL has had an extremely busy quarter, having moved premises to a bright new office, had our Membership and Information Officer begin and recruited for two additional staff, which they hope to appoint during October. NIEL has been awarded the contract to service the Environmental Education Forum for the next three years, which will allow the forum to employ an officer and realise its potential.

Major consultation comments have been prepared on the Review of Public Administration and the Dept of Agriculture and Rural Development's Strategic Plan. Work continues to promote an Environmental Protection Agency, three Conferences are planned for the next nine months and a major membership survey is nearing completion. A seminar for the Planning Appeals Commission is planned for December and a workshop with the Environment and Heritage Service will take place in April.



Wales Environment Link (WEL)

After four years working for WEL, staff and members wished Marc Welsh well as he left in September to start postgraduate study at the University of Wales. Sue Evans has been recruited to replace

Marc in the position of Director. Sue, from Pembrokeshire, South West Wales, has recently been working for WWF's English Regions Team in the North East and Midlands.

WEL recently submitted a joint response (from 19 member organisations) to the Wales Environment Strategy consultation 'Our Environment Our Future Your Views'. Members will continue to follow the progress of the Strategy closely and contribute to its development. WEL is also concentrating on the implementation of the Wales Spatial Plan and will be having a seminar on this topic after the Council Meeting in November.

The revitalised Policy Liaison Group met before the Assembly session, and agreed a number of joint activities. One of these will be a campaign focusing on elections to the Welsh Assembly to be held in 2007. Members will also challenge plans to subsidise inter-Wales air services which will become possible under the Transport (Wales) Bill.

WEL was pleased to launch its new website recently, please visit www.waleslink.org to read more.



Scottish Environment Link (SEL)

Members will soon sign off the LINK corporate strategy to 2009 and will meet in October to agree work priorities for twelve months and longer term

campaign strategy to, and beyond, Scotland's Holyrood parliamentary elections in 2007 and LINK's 4th Members Congress in November will explore successful campaigning.

Members are;

- Pleased with progress on Scotland's Strategic Environmental Assessment Bill;
- Campaigning for limited third party right of appeal with Scotland's Association of Community Councils, in advance of introduction of new Planning Bill for Scotland;
- Continuing discussion with Scottish Ministers on the status of sustainable development in the Executive's structure.

Current Task Force priorities include;

Marine - developing the case for the Scottish Executive to establish a Marine (Scotland) Act;

Agriculture - about to release an audit of Scotland's agriculture;

Landscape - developing a briefing for Scotland's decision-makers;

Climate - re-releasing LINK's 10-point climate action plan, responding on Scottish climate and transport strategy, developing joint positions on biomass, energy efficiency, and sequestration;

Biodiversity - releasing a report on progress towards Scotland's biodiversity targets.

SEL has recruited Jane Herbstritt as the new Parliamentary Officer to succeed Jessica Pepper, who moves on early November to become WWF Scotland's Parliamentary and Campaigns Officer after five busy and successful years with LINK.

News from the Link Secretariat

Management Committee Meeting

The third Management Committee meeting of 2005 was held on 13th September. Issues discussed included plans for Link's 25 year Anniversary celebrations and Link's AGM on 9th December. The next meeting will take place in mid November.

Other Link news...

This quarter we welcomed two new members to Wildlife and Countryside Link; our 36th member – the Association of River Trusts – and in September our 37th member – the Hawk and Owl Trust.

The Secretariat has been very busy preparing for the celebrations in November. We have commissioned Tim Sands (formerly of The Wildlife Trusts) to write a 25 year review of Link's work for launch at our Parliamentary Reception which will be hosted by Peter Ainsworth MP. The first chair of Link, Peter Melchett, Ben Bradshaw, Minister for Local Environment, Marine and Animal Welfare, and Hilary Allison, our current Chair, will all be speaking at our reception on Tuesday 8th November.

We have recently begun redesigning our library and have recruited Philippa Lane as a volunteer to help with this substantial project. As a retired librarian who worked at Plantlife for many years, Philippa is an invaluable asset to the project. We have also taken on Marianne Copeland to voluntarily support our Marine Bill work and we are in the process of recruiting a number of volunteers from the MSc in Conservation course at UCL to

help out in the run-up to our reception.

In addition, as part of our 25th anniversary celebrations, Link has recently commissioned silver lapel pin badges based on our logo for all those attending meetings on behalf of Link. If you would like a Link badge please contact the Link office.



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: Jodie Bettis

Wildlife and Trade

Chair: Rob Atkinson, RSPCA
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
Policy

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