

Media release

Embargoed: Not for broadcast or publication until 00:01 Tues 15 Sept 2015

Putting nature at the heart of plans for farming and for water

Environment sector sets out visions for farming and for water in two influential publications

Voluntary organisations have come together to produce ambitious visions for England’s farmland and the country’s water. Wildlife and Countryside Link (Link) - a coalition of 46 voluntary organisations – has produced two significant publications. ***Farming fit for the Future*** and ***Water Matters*** put restoration of the natural environment at the heart of plans for the future management of farmland, rivers, lakes and wetlands in England.

Link’s Director, Dr Elaine King, said: “Farming and water are so closely linked. We therefore want the Government to take an integrated approach to ensuring that our land and water can provide us with life’s essentials: healthy food, clean drinking water, protection from flooding, secure livelihoods and access to beautiful green and blue spaces with thriving nature.

“Specialists on water and agriculture, from across Link’s member organisations, have contributed their expertise to simultaneously create powerful visions for farming and our water, at a time when action needs to be taken to reverse the decline in our natural environment.”

The overarching themes addressed in ***Water Matters*** and ***Farming fit for the Future*** include pollution, climate change, long-term planning, and restoring wildlife and the countryside. Together the publications call for:

- Long-term planning for the natural environment to be embedded within farming and water policies and practice
- The true value of the natural environment to be recognised so that resources such as water and soils are used wisely
- A clear focus on public money – for example as distributed by the Common Agricultural Policy - being invested in ways that deliver public benefit - such as healthy soils, biodiversity, clean water, flood storage and thriving landscapes
- Land and water to be protected from pollution through better enforcement of penalties, along with fair and effective regulation, so that businesses and the natural environment can thrive

- Farmers, the water industry, the environment sector, and Government to respond appropriately to climate change, for example by increasing public awareness of the value of water and actively supporting farmers to significantly reduce total greenhouse gas emissions
- Measures to maintain and rebuild water and farmland nature habitats so that they, and the wildlife that depend on them, are restored to full health

Acting Chair of Link's Agriculture Working Group, Helen Perkins, said: "These are challenging times for farmers and for nature. **Farming fit for the Future** sets out a vision that can deliver multiple benefits for farming communities and businesses, for our land and livestock, for nature and for the nation; in the immediate term and into the future. We are issuing the vision as a starting point for discussion and look forward to increased dialogue with the Government and the farming industry and community over the coming year."

Acting Chair of Link's Blueprint for Water Group, Hannah Freeman, said: "Over the last 30 years our freshwater species have declined by 76%. Despite such losses less than one per cent of the UK's entire river length and only a small proportion of wetlands are formally protected. **Water Matters** advocates us all working together to manage our water more sensitively, bringing sustainable benefits to the economy and a future full of wildlife rich places that everyone can explore and enjoy."

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For further information please contact:

Anna Guthrie, media & PR manager, The Wildlife Trusts
01636 670075 / 07887 754 659 / aguthrie@wildlifetrusts.org

Mark Simpson, national PR manager, Wildfowl & Wetlands Trust
01453 891138 / 07825 890 590 / mark.simpson@wwt.org.uk

Chris Hickman, senior PR officer, The Woodland Trust
0343 770 5581 / ChrisHickman@woodlandtrust.org.uk

Sarah Bernard, communications manager, Wildlife and Countryside Link
Raul Matamoros, policy & campaigns coordinator, Wildlife and Countryside Link
020 7820 8600 / Sarah@wcl.org.uk / Raul@wcl.org.uk

Notes to editors:

1. Wildlife and Countryside Link (Link) brings together 46 voluntary organisations concerned with the conservation and protection of wildlife and the countryside. Our members practise and advocate environmentally sensitive land management, and encourage respect for and enjoyment of natural

landscapes and features, the historic and marine environment and biodiversity. Taken together our members have the support of over eight million people in the UK and manage over 750,000 hectares of land.

2. **Water Matters** is produced by Wildlife and Countryside Link's Blueprint for Water, a coalition of 16 leading environmental and fishery organisations. Blueprint seeks to restore the ecology of rivers, lakes, ponds and wetlands by seeking improvements to water policy and is campaigning for the Government and its agencies to deliver the steps necessary to achieve 'sustainable water'. The coalition first came together in 2006 to urge the Government to meet the 2015 Water Framework Directive deadline. The Group is currently chaired by Hannah Freeman from Wildfowl & Wetlands Trust.
3. **Farming Fit for the Future** is produced by Wildlife and Countryside Link's Agriculture Working Group. The group works to support and deliver a sustainable, high quality, multi-functional rural environment through influencing and monitoring policy on rural development, agri-environment, bioenergy, and animal welfare standards. The Group is currently chaired by Helen Perkins from The Wildlife Trusts.