

E-bulletin: February 2012

Welcome to Link's February 2012 e-bulletin. Please see below for February's top stories and updates from each of our working groups. If you would like to subscribe to our e-bulletin or submit news items, please contact [Louise](#).



Habitats and Birds Regulations

This month, Link submitted its response to the review of the implementation of the Habitats and Birds Directives, with sign-on from 21 members. [The response is available on our website](#). The key points are as follows:

- The Habitats and Wild Birds Directives have provided valuable protection for Europe's rarest and most threatened habitats and species for over 30 years. Their effective implementation provides a key test for sustainable development, and is necessary to meeting our national and international biodiversity commitments.
- We have found no evidence of gold-plating in the transposition of the Directives; in fact, transposition is incomplete.
- Flaws in implementation are associated with data and evidence gaps, lack of clarity or engagement in process and lack of competence and/or capacity in relevant organisations.
- The implementation of the Directives can be improved in ways that benefit nature conservation and facilitate more streamlined development:
 - Consideration of environmental factors from the outset of the development process;
 - Filling the gaps in necessary data and evidence;
 - Defining favourable conservation status for habitats and species and bringing clarity to the conservation objectives against which impacts are considered, in order to move from a precautionary approach to a more evidence-based approach to decision-making;
 - Ensuring that clear and authoritative guidance is available;
 - Learning from innovation and best practice approaches to planning, avoidance, mitigation and compensation of impacts;
 - Building capacity to engage with the Directives amongst developers, competent authorities and Natural England, and ensuring that relevant legal and ecological expertise is available.

Reports from the Challenge Panels suggest that Defra's thinking is broadly in line with Link's concerns, although their recommendations will still be subject to 'write around' to other Government departments.

Link meets Prince Charles

The [Tubney Charitable Trust](#) (TCT), which until recently co-funded our Marine Policy and Campaigns Coordinator role, held a reception on 9 February. Hosted by His Royal Highness the Prince of Wales, the event celebrated the work of the TCT in championing the natural environment and welfare of farmed animals.

Link's Director, Elaine King, met with Prince Charles, taking the opportunity to explain Link's work and outline challenges currently facing Link and its members.

The charity is closing in March 2012, having spent down its income and capital. Link would like to take this opportunity to thank the Trust for its support of Link's marine project, at a time which saw the introduction of the Marine and Coastal Access Act 2009.

Drought summit

On 20 February, Janina Gray from the Salmon & Trout Association attended the widely publicised Drought Summit on behalf of Link. Hosted by the Secretary of State for the Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, the Rt Hon Caroline Spelman MP, the meeting discussed measures to tackle the current drought situation and what actions need to be taken to mitigate against its impact in the future. It was suggested that a National Drought Management Team be set up and meet on a regular basis. All attendees agreed that the public must be presented with a consistent message and that weather forecasts may be a good place to start to tell people that rain can be a good thing!

Meeting with Greg Clark MP and Bob Neill MP

Link met with the Minister for Decentralisation and Cities, Greg Clark MP and the Parliamentary Under Secretary of State, Bob Neill MP, on 8 February to discuss the forthcoming National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF). Link was informed that The Department for Communities and Local Government (DCLG) would publish guidance where it considers it appropriate to do so. It also confirmed that additional guidance could be provided by third parties on other issues and that stakeholder engagement on the revisions to existing guidance will begin once the NPPF is published in March.

DCLG noted that the Duty to Cooperate is both a statutory obligation for public bodies, but also a test of soundness for plan-making and suggested that it would be applicable in a wide range of circumstances. Greg Clark was 'hugely enthusiastic' about the Natural Environment White Paper agenda, and said that LNPs and NIAs should be expressed within the planning system.

Link submission to the EAC

Link has responded to the [Environmental Audit Committee's inquiry into wildlife crime](#), which was announced on 20 January. The [submission](#) commended the work of the National Wildlife Crime Unit (NWCU) and urged that the introduction of the National Crime Agency (NCA) does not undermine the work of the NWCU. The response also expressed concern over the potential weakening of protection for wildlife and highlighted the need for improved surveillance.

Staff changes at Link

Our Policy and Campaigns Coordinator, Kirsten Loveday, is now on maternity leave. We wish Kirsten all the very best! For updates on who will provide secretariat support for each of our working groups, please see the relevant working group's page on our website. We are currently appointing a new Marine Policy and Campaigns Coordinator and part-time Policy and Campaigns Coordinator.



CAP Consultation

Link has submitted a response to Defra's discussion paper on the [impact in England of EU Commission regulatory proposals for Common Agricultural Policy reform, post 2013](#). The response focuses on the problems around the current direct payment system and makes suggestions regarding the greening proposals for Pillar I.

Letter from the Environment Secretary

The Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, the Rt Hon Caroline Spelman MP, has written to Link thanking us for sending our [Crunch Time for CAP](#) report and confirming that she would like to meet with us in the following months.

Green Food Project

Ian Woodhurst, from CPRE and Vice Chair of the Agriculture Working Group, is representing Link on the sub-group of Defra's [Green Food Project](#). The project is looking at the challenges of increasing food production in an environmentally sustainable way in three case study areas: the Lake District, the North Norfolk coast and the Tamar Valley. The next meeting of the sub-group will be take place on Tuesday 20 March.

RDPE Programme Monitoring Committee

On 29 February the Rural Development Programme for England (RDPE) Programme Monitoring Committee meeting took place. The group primarily discussed RDPE Delivery Team activity, the Axis 1 delivery report, Axis 1, 3 and 4 redesign and the revised RDPE governance arrangements.



Meeting with Defra

Link met with Robin Mortimer and Duncan Williams from Defra's biodiversity policy unit on 20 February to discuss the development of the delivery plan for [Biodiversity2020](#). This was Link's first meeting with Robin Mortimer since he became the Director of Rural Affairs, Land Use and Climate Change Adaptation for Defra. Discussions focused on Link's critique of [Biodiversity2020](#) and on the governance structures for NGO engagement with Defra.

Meeting with Natural England

On 15 February Link met Pete Brotherton, Head of Profession for Biodiversity at Natural England. Discussions centred on the definitions of species and habitat outcomes in [Biodiversity2020](#) and issues surrounding the target to increase priority habitat areas by 200,000 hectares. Concern was expressed that, since it is very difficult to develop evidence for most outcomes, there may be too heavy a focus on the few indicators that can be measured.

Terrestrial Biodiversity Group

The Terrestrial Biodiversity Group (TBG), part of the Governance structure for the delivery of [Biodiversity2020](#), held a meeting on 23 February primarily to discuss [Biodiversity Action Reporting System \(BARS\) 2](#) and the final draft of the [Biodiversity2020 Delivery Plan](#). Nicola Hutchinson, from

Plantlife and Chair of Link's Biodiversity Working Group (BWG), attended the meeting on behalf of Link.

England Biodiversity Stakeholder Group

Miles King, from The Grasslands Trust and Vice Chair of the BWG, represented Link at the first England Biodiversity Stakeholder Group (EBSG) meeting on 22 February. This meeting was primarily to introduce the role of the EBSG and outline the group's terms of reference. The group also discussed the draft delivery plan for [Biodiversity2020](#).

People Engagement Group

Following Link's invitation to join the People Engagement Group (PEG) of *Biodiversity2020* in December 2011, Heather McFarlane from the Bat Conservation Trust has kindly agreed to represent Link on this group. The first PEG meeting took place on 9 February. Discussions focussed on deciding how the group could help achieve one of the 22 *Biodiversity2020* outcomes - "*By 2020, significantly more people will be engaged in biodiversity issues, aware of its value and taking positive action*".



Habitats and Birds

Challenge Panels

As part of the Habitats and Birds Directives Implementation Review, Defra ran a series of Challenge Panels to discuss key issues and potential measures emerging from the review. A number of Link members have attended these Challenge Group sessions, which have looked at implementation of the Directives, data and evidence and new methods of implementation in line with ecosystems approach.

Group meeting

On 22 February Link held an internal meeting to discuss our submission to the review – which has received a positive response – and the Challenge Panels. It was agreed that the group would write to the review team to reiterate our key concerns. The next, and final, stakeholder meeting is likely to be held on Budget Day (when the results of the review will be published), or very soon afterwards.



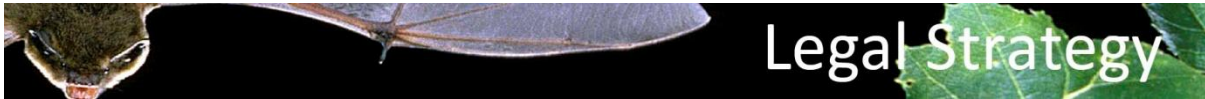
Land Use Planning

National Planning Policy Framework

The Land Use Planning Working Group (LUPWG) met on 20 February to discuss Link's 'red lines' for the [National Planning Policy Framework](#) (NPPF), which is expected to be published in March.

Best practice guidance on planning

On 5 March Link will be holding a meeting to look at the best practice guidance on planning, drawn up primarily by The Wildlife Trusts and the Town and Country Planning Association (TCPA).



Legal Strategy

Working Group meeting

The Legal Strategy Working Group met on 15 February. Following the very positive meeting between Link and Dr Keith Vincent from the Law Commission in January the group discussed the Law Commission's [review of wildlife legislation](#) and agreed ways in which Link and its members can continue to engage effectively with the review team. The group also discussed Link's response to the Defra review of the implementation of the Habitats and Birds Directives, which was submitted on 7 February, as well as the group's 2012 workplan. Tom Quinn, from IFAW and Vice Chair of the Wildlife Trade Working Group and Paul Minor, from CPRE and Chair of the Land Use Planning Working Group, also gave an update on their respective groups.

Advisory Group meeting

The Law Commission's Advisory Group on reforms to wildlife law is meeting on 5 March to discuss the Commission's current thinking on the project and potential reforms. Link will be represented at the meeting by Matt Shardlow, from Buglife and Chair of the Legal Strategy Working Group.



Marine

Link Marine Working Group meeting

The Marine Working Group met on 31 January primarily to discuss the consultations for the Marine Conservation Zones (MCZ) impact assessments and the group's workplan for the year. Tim Robbins, Chief Officer at the Devon and Severn Inshore Fisheries Conservation Agency (IFCA), joined the meeting to discuss the IFCA's role in the development and protection of Marine Protected Areas.

Marine Strategy Framework Directive

Link will be meeting with Defra on 23 April to discuss the public consultation on the implementation of the [Marine Strategy Framework Directive](#) (MSFD). Defra's consultation on the UK Initial Assessment and Good Environmental Status (GES) targets and indicators is expected to be published in the next couple of weeks.

Stakeholder Focus Group

The MMO Stakeholder Focus Group met on 28 February to discuss the MSFD Defra Marine Spatial Planning and Marine Licensing. The Planning Inspectorate (PINS) also gave a presentation at the meeting on the independent investigations within the marine planning system with which they have been involved.



Natural Environment White Paper

EFRA evidence session

The Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (EFRA) Select Committee held their fourth evidence session on the Natural Environment White Paper on 29 February. The Minister of State, the Rt Hon Oliver

Letwin MP and the Economic Secretary to the Treasury, Chloe Smith MP both gave evidence. To see the full evidence session click [here](#).

The next EFRA evidence session on the White Paper will take place on 27 March with the Minister for Natural Environment and Fisheries, Richard Benyon MP, providing evidence.



Institution of Civil Engineers

The Blueprint for Water coalition has now submitted written evidence to The Institution of Civil Engineers (ICE) State of the Nation report on Water. The evidence will be used by the ICE, alongside desk research and oral evidence, to inform the content of their report and develop recommendations that will be put to governments and decision makers throughout the UK.

Ways of working meeting

On 29 February the Blueprint coalition held a ways of working workshop at the London Wetland Centre to reflect on where the group has been successful and to analyse the Blueprint group and its policy priorities and tactics going forward.

Priority substances meeting

Defra convened a priority substances teleconference on 20 February to discuss further developments on the European Commission's review of the list of priority substances and the UK impact assessment that is taking place. Defra expressed concern over the cost benefit aspect of the impact assessment and have asked NGOs to contribute to the work of their consultants regarding benefits and also present an alternative view on costs. Rob Collins from the Rivers Trust attended the meeting on behalf of Link.

'Love Your Rivers' campaign

Kate Hand attended Defra's first steering group meeting on their 'Love Your Rivers' campaign on 16 February. The campaign stems from the Government's commitment to run a campaign on water efficiency as outlined in the Water White Paper. The campaign aims to raise awareness about the connection between how individuals and communities use water and the state of their rivers. The campaign will adopt a Big Society approach using local media to spread the message.



IWC like-minded meeting

A meeting of the International Whaling Commission (IWC) like-minded countries is scheduled for 5 March, in London. Discussions will include: the ongoing whaling in Japan, Norway and Iceland; changes within the IWC; like-minded initiatives and, resolutions for the 64th Annual Meeting of the IWC, scheduled to take place in Panama from 11 June to 6 July.

Meeting with the IWC Commissioner

Ahead of the IWC like-minded meeting, the Link Whales Working Group will be meeting Nigel Gooding the newly re-appointed IWC Commissioner on 2 March.



JLG meeting

Members of the Link Wildlife Trade Working Group attended a meeting on 11 January of the Joint NGO Liaison Group (JLG), chaired by Defra's [Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species](#) (CITES) and International Species Policy Team. Discussions focused around the EU regulations review which aims to be finalised by April 2012 and preparations for the 16th Conference of the Parties on CITES in March 2013. The next JLG meeting will take place on 16 May in London.



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