



Political Strategy Report

Autumn 2012

1. INTRODUCTION

Items where a decision of the Board and Network are requested ***appear in bold italics***. The sections of the PSR follow the different levels of government, and our involvement in the various branches at each level.

2. ELECTIONS

2(a) European elections

The next European Parliament elections are to be held in June, 2014.

2(b) Westminster elections

The next Westminster General Election is to be held in May, 2015.

2(c) Holyrood elections

The next elections for Holyrood will be held in May, 2016.

2(d) Council elections

The next local council are due to be held in May 2016 but this date may change due to a clash with the Holyrood elections.

2(e) LINK Rolling Manifesto

The Rolling Manifesto set to be refreshed and a timetable will be circulated for this exercise in October 2012.

3. PARTY RELATIONSHIPS

3(a) Conservatives

Relationships with the Conservatives are reasonably cordial and cooperative at present. A fringe meeting is planned for their spring conference.

3(b) Greens

LINK attended the Green conference in Glasgow in October - where we hosted a successful fringe meeting on the LINK economics paper, with Alison Johnstone MSP speaking. Relationships with the Greens are cordial and cooperative at present.

3(c) Labour

Relationships with Labour are reasonably cordial and cooperative at present and several useful meetings have been held with researchers and MSPs at their request. We are investigating holding a fringe meeting at their spring conference – jointly with SERA.

3(d) Liberal Democrats

Relationships with the Liberal Democrats are reasonably cordial and cooperative at present. We are planning a fringe meeting at their spring conference – jointly with the Green Liberal Democrats.

3(e) Scottish Nationalists

LINK will hold a fringe meeting to discuss our economics paper at their conference in Perth on 20th October. Relationships with the SNP are reasonably cordial and cooperative at present but there are emerging tensions as they become defensive to criticism of the Government in the run up to the independence referendum. The regular meetings with the relevant Ministers are being re-established after the recent ministerial reshuffle. ***Do the Board and Network wish to discuss tensions with the SNP?***

4. LOCAL GOVERNMENT LEVEL

Due to capacity issues and a lessening of momentum the LINK Local Governance Task Force has gone into abeyance. The Rolling Manifesto will still capture policy proposals at local level. The possibility of bringing independent local environmental groups into the LINK network is being discussed currently.

5. SCOTTISH LEVEL

5(a) Legislative Issues

The following bills are currently in progress and of interest to members.

Freedom of Information (Amendment) (Scotland) Bill (G) - Introduced 30 May *Lead committee – Finance*

Scottish Civil Justice Council and Criminal Legal Assistance Bill (G) - Stage 1 (evidence, lead committee (Justice)) 26 June – LINK written evidence in preparation.

Water Resources (Scotland) Bill (G) - Introduced 27 June – LINK invited to provide 3 witnesses to give Stage1 evidence.

New Bills of interest to members were announced in the legislative programme speech as follows.

Better Regulation Bill - The bill will aim to improve the way regulations are applied, with specific measures to further reform planning and deliver a "simpler and more effective" legislative framework for environmental regulation and enforcement.

Budget Bill - The annual Budget Bill provides parliamentary approval for the Scottish government's spending plans.

Forth Estuary Transport Authority Bill - The bill will co-ordinate the management and maintenance of the Forth Road Bridge and the new crossing.

Land and Buildings Transaction Tax Bill - The bill will set out how the proposed replacement for stamp duty land tax will operate.

Landfill Tax Bill - The bill will put in place a replacement for landfill tax in Scotland, establishing the administration, charges and rules governing the new scheme.

Procurement Reform Bill - The bill will establish a national legislative framework for "sustainable public procurement to support economic growth". The government said it would aim to do this by "delivering community benefits, supporting innovation, considering

environmental requirements and promoting public procurement processes and systems which are transparent, streamlined, standardised, proportionate, fair and business-friendly".

Referendum Bill - The bill aims to clear the way for an independence referendum to take place in autumn 2014. It will include provisions for the date of the referendum, the franchise and the procedures to be followed. The bill will also provide for oversight arrangements to ensure the referendum is run to the highest international standards, with the involvement of the Electoral Commission and Electoral Management Board.

Tribunals Bill - The bill will establish a new, simplified statutory framework for tribunals which determine devolved matters.

In addition, consideration is being given to the consultation on a **Community Empowerment Bill**.

5(b) Administrative Issues

LINK Task Forces are engaged in continued stakeholder engagements and monitoring of the progress of the SNP Administration, based on their manifesto commitments. These were largely of a tentative nature in the field of the environment – and dominated overall by a continued overarching commitment to "sustainable economic development". The Programme for Government continues to be "light in environmental substance". In particular receipt of monitoring and advocacy are, *inter alia*:

- Scottish input to reform of the **Common Agricultural & Fisheries Policies**;
- the Government's **zero waste plan**;
- the Scottish Government's **Budget**, and 'carbon accounting' of the spending priorities therein;
- the proper implementation of the **Sustainable Land Use Strategy**;
- the administration to **Climate Change** targets – both in respect of mitigation and adaptation;
- whether the administration plans any **major restructuring** of the environmental agencies with a close eye to be kept on the **Forestry Commission** Scotland (following changes made in Wales and under discussion in England);
- the will of the new Government to implement the **Marine Act** (where the extent of their commitment may be flagging) and
- the refresh by SNH of the **Biodiversity Strategy**.

The LINK **Economics Group** is about to publish a major paper commissioned from Simon Pepper on the move towards sustainable wellbeing. **Governance Matters** is being pursued further with the possibility of a LINK conference in 2013.

5(c) Infrastructure and Planning Issues

Several major planning decisions are in process and have been discussed by the Planning Task Force. The development agenda remains dominated by:

- energy issues – including new windfarms, fossil fuel and nuclear powered generation (after the withdrawal of the Hunterston proposal) and on transmission lines;
- marine renewable energy development issues;
- ongoing introduction of local development plans;
- the review of **permitted development rights** (PDRs) – including the matters of hill tracks (with progress on their removal from the list of PDRs) and micro energy generation, and
- transport issues – including the Forth Crossing, the Aberdeen Western Peripheral Route and a variety of road dualling schemes.

In the context of the continued development of terrestrial wind farms, the Landscape Task Force have developed proposals for the Board and Network to discuss means of directing government subsidies and incentives from terrestrial wind to newer, more efficient and less intrusive forms of renewables at a LINK seminar in early November.

5(d) Judicial Issues

The Legal Governance Group is dealing with legislative issues and consultations arising from the several reviews of legal procedures in Scotland. Continued progress is being made on several fronts and in particular with regard to the Protected Expenses Orders.

5(e) Civic Issues

LINK continues its involvement in SCVO and LINK members are widening the field of their co-operation with others in the Civic Sector (as within Stop Climate Chaos Scotland - SCCS). Meetings have been held with the Confederation of British Industry (Scotland) and contacts with the STUC, the Church of Scotland, the Poverty Alliance and other groups are growing.

5(f) Political Horizon

We published our **Referendum Challenge leaflet** in May 2012, setting out our position on the dominant political issue of the day – and the foreseeable future. The aspirational approach has been followed by other groups in civic Scotland. It appears to be the case, though, that most active discussion of substantive issues is likely to be overshadowed until after the October 2014 referendum.

6 UNITED KINGDOM LEVEL

The UK Government continues to take an all-out approach to raising **Gross Domestic Product**. The attention of the Coalition to environmental issues appears to be stymied by the almost total focus of the Treasury on purely economic matters.

The **Scotland Act** passed at Westminster, but House of Lords reform has been dropped from the legislative programme. It is unlikely that any major constitutional reforms will be passed in this Parliament.

Several officers, members and staff attended the joint LINKs biennial meeting in Belfast during September. Contacts were refreshed and continuing cooperation discussed.

7. EUROPEAN AND INTERNATIONAL LEVELS

Issues of interest to LINK at present include the following.

- LINK members are following the developments in the **UN Climate Change** process, principally, but not exclusively through involvement in SCCS.
- The Rio De Janeiro conference in 2012 of the **Convention on Biological Diversity. (Rio+20)** was not considered a major success with governments concentrating their attention on the financial crisis. LINK's efforts helped to ensure Scottish Government engagement in the process.
- LINK members are closely following the implementation of the **Marine Strategy Framework Directive** and the debate around the **Industrial Emissions Directive** (which has particular importance with regard to CO2 emissions).
- Attention is continuing to be focussed on the possibility of the Commission introducing a draft Directives on **Sustainable Procurement** and **Non-Native Invasive Species**.
- The EU **Common Fisheries Policy** is due for major reform and consultations continue.

- Discussions continue for the next major opportunity to change the EU **Common Agriculture Policy** in the 2014 EU budget.
- Financial weakness in the Western economies and turbulence in the world markets continues to cast shadows of protectionism across the globe, with the **Doha** WTO negotiations apparently in limbo still.
- **Jonny Hughes** of SWT has been elected to the **Council of the IUCN**.

The Parliamentary Officer attended the Congress and AGM of the **European Environment Bureau** (EEB) in September in Brussels. Progress is being made towards understanding the potential for LINK (together with WCL and other UK interests) to maximise inputs to the EEB with small effort.

LINK continues to support the **IUCN Peatlands** work, which now has an administrative base in our Parliamentary office.

8. CONCLUSION

This PSR contains fewer questions than earlier iterations. Many important areas are covered, however, and large strategic issues are discussed. ***Are there any areas that the Board and Network wish to concentrate on in the next PSR?***

ABM/PO 11.10.12