



# Political Strategy Report

Spring 2011

## **1. INTRODUCTION**

Items where a decision of the Board and Network are requested ***will appear in bold italics***. As per the decision of the Board in Autumn 2010 the Report is shorter than before – and a separate, wide ranging paper on governance issues has been written for the consideration of the Board and Network in parallel with this report.

## **2. ELECTIONS**

### **2(a) European elections**

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

### **2(b) Westminster elections**

The date of the Westminster General Election is in May 2015 (subject to the Bill setting fixed five year terms being approved at Westminster this summer).

### **2(c) Holyrood elections**

The next elections for Holyrood will be held on Thursday, 5<sup>th</sup> May, 2011. Engagement with the political parties concerning manifestos has been ongoing. A list of hustings events organised by or related to LINK members is active on the website. Assistance has been given to a group of members seeking signatures for a Wildlife Pledge. The Marine Taskforce has sought candidate signatures for a Marine Pledge. The term of the next Scottish Parliament is being extended to five years (by agreement) and will last until elections in 2016.

### **2(d) Council elections**

The next local council elections will be held on Thursday, 3<sup>rd</sup> May, 2012. Local council issues are being covered in the LINK rolling manifesto and section **8(d) Council Chambers**, below, includes more detailed discussion of our local government work.

### **2(e) LINK Rolling Manifesto**

The Rolling Manifesto set out to cover all levels of our political activity and now consists of 35 sub-sections in 12 substantive policy areas. The ideas were brought to the attention of all parties and many LINK ideas and policy prescriptions appear in the party manifestos for the Holyrood election. Although the first stage of the manifesto roll-out took longer than expected, the foundations of this longer-term project are now in place, and the next stage of development aims to add further sub-sections, to refresh the existing sections and sharpen our "asks" for the 2012 local council elections. ***Are the Board and Network content the rolling manifesto should be refreshed this summer by the Parliamentary Officer acting with Task Forces and Representatives?***

### **3. PARTY RELATIONSHIPS**

#### **3(a) Conservatives**

The next Conservative conference is due in June 2012 – their having held a pre-election conference this March. Relationships with the Conservatives are reasonably cordial and cooperative at present. Their Scottish 2011 manifesto demonstrates that a significant amount of work has still to be done to persuade them of the necessity of achieving sustainable development.

#### **3(b) Greens**

The next Green conference is due in Autumn 2012 – their having held a pre-election conference this March. Relationships with the Greens are cordial and cooperative at present. Their 2011 Scottish manifesto demonstrates a considerable grasp of the principles of sustainable development.

#### **3(c) Labour**

The next Labour conference is due in March 2012 (although an Autumn conference is being considered) – their having held a pre-election conference this March. Relationships with Labour are reasonably cordial and cooperative at present. Their Scottish 2011 manifesto demonstrates that a significant amount of work has still to be done to persuade them of the necessity of moving speedily towards sustainable development.

#### **3(d) Liberal Democrats**

The next Liberal Democrat conference is due in November, their having held a pre-election conference this March. Relationships with the SNP are reasonably cordial and cooperative at present. Their Scottish 2011 manifesto demonstrates that a considerable amount of work has still to be done to persuade them of the necessity of moving more speedily towards sustainable development.

#### **3(e) Scottish Nationalists**

The next SNP conference is due in September, their having held a pre-election conference this March. Relationships with the Liberal Democrats are reasonably cordial and cooperative at present. Their Scottish 2011 manifesto demonstrates that a considerable amount of work has still to be done to persuade them of the necessity of moving towards sustainable development.

### **4. SCOTTISH LEGISLATION**

#### **4(a) Current Legislation**

LINK worked hard to influence the development of the **Wildlife and Natural Environment (Scotland) Bill** (WNE) through several Taskforces. LINK submissions and amendments covering all relevant aspects of the Bill (*inter-alia*, deer, wildlife crime, non-native invasive species, the game laws and upland issues) were made. The issue of Government and Parliamentarians “balancing the various interests” involved, particularly with regard to deer management, are discussed fully in the governance paper. ***Would the Board and Network wish to pass comment on such balancing at present?***

#### **4(b) The Legislative Horizon**

The legislative horizon has been cleared with the Holyrood elections. Several items of legislation have been proposed to the parties by LINK members (with **Environmental Justice** being the thrust of considerable advocacy) but no major LINK campaign has been mounted with attention being transferred – as per recent PSR’s – to the matter of proper scrutiny. (This issue is covered in the Governance paper submitted separately to this report). SEPA have

invited LINK representatives to early discussion of legislation they think might be required to implement their **Better Regulation** agenda.

## **5. SCOTTISH ADMINISTRATION**

### **5(a) Current/Horizon Administrative Issues**

LINK Task Forces are engaged in a vast range of Government consultations and “stakeholder” engagements. The Scottish Government may well change in May and until the election is over and the next government emerges, the policy options to be pursued cannot be completely clear. In particular, courses of action will require speedy review in the fields of, *inter alia*:

- reform of the **Common Agricultural Policy**;
- the Government’s **zero waste plan**;
- the Scottish Government **budget** and ‘**carbon assessment**’ of the spending priorities therein;
- whether the **Sustainable Land Use Strategy** should be improved on the basis of the recently published document;
- the attitude of the next administration to **Climate Change** targets – both in respect of mitigation and adaptation;
- whether the next administration plans any **major restructuring** of the environmental agencies; and
- the will of the next Government to implement the **Marine Act**.

## **6. MAJOR SCOTTISH INFRASTRUCTURE AND PLANNING ISSUES**

### **6(a) Current 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 and on transmission lines;
- marine renewable energy development issues;
- major leisure developments – including the golf resort at Menie Links (the Rannoch resort having been rejected);
- the review of permitted development rights – including the matters of hill tracks and micro energy generation, and
- transport issues – including the Forth Crossing, the Aberdeen Western Peripheral Route and a variety of road dualling schemes.

## **7. SCOTTISH JUDICIAL ISSUES**

Access to justice in environmental matters, for relevant parties such as communities or eNGOs, remains prohibitively expensive in Scotland, although the award of Scotland’s first Protective Costs Orders offers some hope of change. It is worth noting in this connection that the EU Commission has recently announced that it is to take the UK to the European Court of Justice with regard to access to justice issues and alleged Aarhus non-compliance.

## **8. POLITICAL HORIZON SCAN**

### **8(a) Brussels and Beyond**

Issues of interest to LINK at present include the following.

- LINK members are following the developments in the **UN Climate Change** process following on from the Cancun COP/MOP meeting, with the next milestone being the 34th session of the UNFCCC Convention Subsidiary Bodies in Bonn, Germany on 6th – 17th June, 2011

- 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).
- The EU **Common Fisheries Policy** is due for major reform in 2012 and consultations continue.
- Discussions are underway this year for next major opportunity to change the EU **Common Agriculture Policy** for the 2014 budget.
- **Iceland and Croatia** continue to pursue EU membership. Were Iceland to join this might have ramifications for fisheries and marine protection policy. Considerable difficulty is being experienced en route, however, due to domestic opposition and sensitivity over fishing and whaling.
- 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.
- The Japanese earthquake and tsunami in March were followed by the largest nuclear power crisis since Chernobyl at the **Fukushima** reactors. This event, together with the German closure of seven nuclear power stations has become a major new factor in the debate about the nuclear industry's resurgence.

### **8(b) Westminster**

The Conservative/Liberal Democrat Coalition Government in Westminster were forced into changing their plans on selling off the **Forestry Commission Estate** and cutting the **National Wildlife Crime Unit**. On the other hand, they continue to pursue **nuclear power** generation and an all-out approach to raising **Gross Domestic Product** (despite a glimmer of publicity and movement around measuring national well-being and happiness). The UK Budget provided a political gesture to the driving lobby by cutting **fuel duties** and abandoning yet again the fuel price escalator mechanism. This is an issue which should be monitored carefully as **oil prices** are still rising in a market unsettled by events in Libya, Bahrain and across the Middle East. Meanwhile the legislative timetable continues until October's Queen's Speech, with, in particular, LINK members moving amendments in the debate over the **Energy Bill**.

The Scotland Bill continues to make its Westminster passage and is almost certain to pass, with new powers over the setting of income tax. LINK members briefed the Scottish Parliament Committee charged with scrutinising the Bill on our relatively minor concerns, particularly with reference to the need for the Scottish Parliament to take a swift decision about the hypothecation of aggregate or landfill taxes.

### **8(c) Holyrood**

It is highly unlikely that the proportional electoral system for elections to the Holyrood Parliament will produce a majority party. The SNP have indicated a preference for minority government should they be the largest party in the new Parliament – but have not rejected the possibility of coalition. The Labour party have indicated (with considerable background dissent) that they would prefer a coalition but will also considerable minority government. Both may find the political arithmetic difficult as it is possible that the Greens, Conservatives and Liberal Democrats will all have significant blocs in the new legislature – and a three party coalition has not yet happened in Scotland. LINK will have to consider its detailed strategies carefully in the case of either a minority or a coalition government and this assessment will be required in late May or early June 2011. ***Are the Board and Network content that a Parliamentary Forum meeting (currently set for 31<sup>st</sup> May) be expanded, to include LINK Representatives and Board Members, to discuss this matter?***

The General Election campaign has, thus far, been about the different spending priorities of the parties, and the budget cuts are likely to dominate Scottish politics in the next three to four years as the budget is remorselessly squeezed. LINK's submissions to the Government on the

last **Budget Bill** and to the **Christie Commission** on the future of public services, both point to an ongoing need to push the case for sustainable development as it is still largely eclipsed by the parties' thinking that economic growth is absolutely imperative. In environmental policy terms the balance on power generation has moved with the Labour decision to not oppose **nuclear development** on existing sites – pitting Labour and the Conservatives against the SNP, the Liberal Democrats and the Greens on this issue (and possibly allowing it to become a major election issue before polling day and thereafter).

With either a minority or a coalition government, a series of legislative, administrative, judicial and civic **governance issues** are an underlying feature of Scottish politics and have been identified by LINK as significant barriers to our pursuit of sustainability. A separate paper on governance issues is being consulted upon by LINK and its members, and it is hoped that this may both allow us to prioritise our concerns, consider what action might be taken and consult others across the policy community as to their views on governance matters. ***Are the Board and Network satisfied that we can react speedily to the outcome of the election (bearing in mind the parallel discussion of governance issues)?***

#### **8(d) Council Chambers**

Scotland's Councils face the electorate in May 2012, in a distinct election for the first time since devolution. LINK's SOA Task Force has decided to follow through on its work on Single Outcome Agreements and audit of local councils' environmental performance. It has agreed to assess the incoming administration's approach to local government, to determine how we can best continue to deploy slim resources to monitor council performances, and to work on "asks" of the parties for inclusion in their manifestos for the council elections – nationally and locally. LINK's intervention in the area of local government has met with a more positive and accepting response of late, despite CoSLA's initial antipathy. It is likely, however, that sensitivities will be stirred in local councils as we proceed into this, for LINK, new area of work – especially where we have no recognisable organisation at the grassroots. ***Are the Board and Network content with this proposed work plan?***

#### **10. CONCLUSION**

This third 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 11.04.11