



Political Strategy Report

Spring 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 date of the 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 elections will be held on Thursday, 3rd May, 2012. The Local Governance Task Force has been following through the campaign plan and manifesto for the elections prepare in 2011 (see below).

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 manifesto is due to be refreshed in Autumn 2012. ***Do the Board and Network have particular concerns they wish addressed or any suggested changes to the Rolling manifesto?***

3. PARTY RELATIONSHIPS

3(a) Conservatives

LINK attended the Conservative conference in March 2012 in Troon - where we hosted a successful fringe meeting on Governance Matters, addressed by Jamie MacGrigor MSP. Relationships with the Conservatives are reasonably cordial and cooperative at present. The party has elected Ruth Davidson MSP as its new leader.

3(b) Greens

LINK attended the Green conference is due in November 2011 in Aberdeen- where we hosted a successful fringe meeting on Governance Matters, with Patrick Harvey MSP speaking. Relationships with the Greens are cordial and cooperative at present.

3(c) Labour

Due to excessive costs LINK did not attend the Labour conference in March 2012. Relationships with Labour are reasonably cordial and cooperative at present and we received high praise for *Acting Locally*, our local government manifesto, at a meeting held with Sarah Boyack MSP and Claudia Beamish MSP, the party's new local government and environment spokespersons. Scottish Labour have elected Johann Lamont MSP as their new leader.

3(d) Liberal Democrats

LINK attended the Liberal Democrat conference in March 2012 in Inverness - where we hosted a successful fringe meeting on Governance Matters, with Liam MacArthur MSP speaking. Relationships with the Liberal Democrats are reasonably cordial and cooperative at present.

3(e) Scottish Nationalists

LINK attended the SNP conference in Inverness in November 2011 and a fringe meeting on Governance Matters was held with Joan McAlpine MSP speaking. Relationships with the SNP are reasonably cordial and cooperative at present. The regular meetings with the relevant Ministers have been re-established after the 2011 election.

4. SCOTTISH LOCAL GOVERNMENT LEVEL

Scotland's Councils face the electorate on 3rd May 2012, in a distinct election for the first time since devolution. LINK's Local Governance Task Force and has followed through on its work on Single Outcome Agreements and audit of local councils' environmental performance.

- **Election Campaign:** A campaign plan was drawn up by the Task Force and circulated around the Network. A full manifesto – **Acting Locally** - was prepared and launched in October 2011. The campaign was designed to challenge the political parties to take full cognisance of the environmental issues and sustainable development in their election preparations – and to raise the profile of local environmental matters at a more local level throughout the period until May 2012. A **cyber-action** bringing the manifesto to the attention of MSPs met with limited success. A few **hustings** meetings are being held during April 2012. The attitude all of Scotland's political parties to the elections has been less than enthusiastic. The media paid no regard to LINK media releases on the paucity of policy work carried out across the country by the parties.
- **Monitoring:** The Task Force requested a meeting with officials, local government bodies and Audit Scotland to discuss progress towards proper listing of the environmental powers and duties of local Councils – and monitoring of the implementation of key tasks. This was met with a negative response. The Task Force intends to pursue the matter further in the context of the Scottish Government's review of Single Outcome Agreements (SOAs) and Community Planning Partnerships (CPPs), where contact has now been established. A briefing on the Community Empowerment Bill, set to be published in autumn 2012, is in preparation.
- **Parliamentary Scrutiny:** Efforts to promote increased Parliamentary scrutiny of local government performance are planned in conjunction with the initiatives outlined above.

Our growing expertise and involvement in local government matters has provoked only a limited response from Councils and officials, and some antagonism to increased pressure on their allocation of budgets in a time of relative austerity may yet arise. The political parties and the Government have been similarly less than fully engaged with our issues in this area – but the Task Force continues to pursue our agenda vigorously with the hope that we are in the

early years of involvement with Council matters. ***Do the Board and Network want to undertake a strategic review of our involvement in campaigning around elections – and in particular manifestoes, cyber-actions and hustings?***

5. SCOTTISH LEVEL

5(a) Legislative Issues

The Legislative Programme currently passing through Parliament contains 16 Bills and the following are of interest to LINK and its members.

- [Agricultural Holdings](#)
- [Budget](#)
- [Land Registration](#)
- [Water](#)
- [Legal Aid & Scottish Civil Justice Council](#)
- [Aquaculture & Fisheries](#)

We may be also that some have a broad interest in the Freedom of Information (Amendment) Bill.

Several items of legislation have been proposed to the parties by LINK members (with **Environmental Justice** being the thrust of considerable advocacy and the **Gill Review** the potential source of legislation – see above) but no major LINK legislative campaign has been mounted with attention being transferred – as per recent PSR's – to the matter of proper scrutiny. This issue is covered fully in Governance Matters. SEPA have invited LINK representatives to early discussion of legislation they think might be required to implement their **Better Regulation** agenda. The Local Governance Task Force are preparing for next year's **Community Empowerment Bill**, as above.

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, Comprehensive Spending Review (CSR), National Performance Framework** and 'carbon accounting' of the spending priorities therein;
- The review of **SOAs** and **CPPs**, as above;
- 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 (although this looks increasingly unlikely), with a close eye to be kept on the **Forestry Commission** Scotland (following changes made in Wales);
- the will of the new Government to implement the **Marine Act** (which currently appears to have a full commitment) and
- the refresh by SNH of the **Biodiversity Strategy**.

The LINK **Economics Group** has been established to marshal and sharpen our arguments for full sustainability, moving beyond GDP and to create an overarching advocacy strategy to pursue these objectives. A brief has been drawn up and is out to tender to contractors. Taken together with the principles laid down in our response to the 2010 Budget and our views on Preventative Spending, set out in our submission to the Christie Commission, this should create a new core for our approach to the Budget, CSR and all other economic matters.

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 and on transmission lines;
- marine renewable energy development issues;
- major leisure developments – such as the golf resort at Menie Links;
- ongoing introduction of local development plans;
- the review of **permitted development rights** (PDRs) – including the matters of hill tracks (with their removal from the draft 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 are developing 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. ***Are the Board and Network prepared for further discussion of energy policy at a high level?***

5(d) Judicial Issues

Access to justice in environmental matters, for relevant parties such as communities or eNGOs, remains expensive in Scotland, although the award of Scotland's first Protective Costs Orders offers hope of gradual change. LINK has established a **Legal Governance Group** which is actively pursuing environmental justice. It is worth noting in this connection the recent decision of the European Court of Justice with regard to access to justice issues in the UK and Aarhus non-compliance. It is also worth noting that:

- the Gill Review in Scotland may lead to legislation allowing the opportunity to tackle this issue;
- The Supreme Court in London has awarded a Protected Expenses Order in a case on appeal concerning the **Fife local plan**; and
- the SNP manifesto committed the Government to publicly consult of the possibility of establishing an environmental court and LINK has had contact with the relevant officials.

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). The LINK discussion paper Governance Matters calls for much wider alliances across civic Scotland in order to pursue the reform of governance. It also calls for reform within the civic sector itself and the pursuit of a Civic Forum. These issues continue to be pursued by the newly established **Governance Group** and staff, as per recent PSRs.

5(f) Political Horizon

The political Horizon remains dominated by the constitutional debate. LINK is to adopt a position for the forthcoming referendum by the planned publication of the **Referendum Challenge leaflet** in May 2012. The leaflet was discussed at Congress and it was agreed that our position should be to state the aspirations of LINK and its members and to challenge those campaigning for constitutional change to explain in detail (for publication) why their proposed

option best met our aspirations. LINK will continue to campaign quietly on the governance issues which have been identified as barriers to achieving our goals – and to point out that these matters require attention regardless of the outcome of the referendum.

6 UNITED KINGDOM LEVEL

The Conservative/Liberal Democrat Coalition Government in Westminster have entered a battle with conservationists on the issue of loosening **planning laws** in England and Wales in an attempt to kick start economic growth. This is similar political territory to their plans on selling off the **Forestry Commission Estate** and cutting the **National Wildlife Crime Unit** where they were forced to do u-turns and evidence of a similar retreat on planning is becoming clearer. Meanwhile, the Government continues to pursue **nuclear power** generation which has recently been given an additional £50m subsidy as a carbon neutral energy source – although this has been met by a continuing withdrawal of the energy corporates from the nuclear field.

The UK Government continues to take an all-out approach to raising **Gross Domestic Product**. Oil prices are still at record levels in a market unsettled by events in Libya, Bahrain and across the Middle East. Meanwhile the legislative timetable at Westminster draws to a conclusion in May prior to a new Queen's Speech, with, in particular, LINK members moving amendments in the debate over the **Energy Bill**.

The **Scotland Bill** awaits Royal Consent after an agreement between the UK and Scottish Governments on its terms, with new powers over the setting of income tax but none of the major SNP demands included. A decision in the Scottish Parliament is, therefore, required, about the future of hypothecation of aggregate or landfill taxes. ***Do the board and Network wish to develop positions on the future of hypothecation and these taxes?*** It is suggested that this matter might be addressed urgently by the Economics Group. The additional powers requested by the SNP Scottish Government have now been largely dropped at Westminster but moves to reform the **Crown Estate** remains a live issue.

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 following principally but not exclusively through involvement in SCCS;
- There is considerable interest in the Rio De Janeiro conference in 2012 of the **Convention on Biological Diversity. (Rio+20)**. LINK members have been involved in a temporary alliance group and have published a challenge linked to the themes of Rio, including governance, sustainable economics and poverty. Pressure on the Scottish Government to fully engage at Rio continues.
- 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 in 2012 and consultations continue.
- Discussions continue for the next major opportunity to change the EU **Common Agriculture Policy** in the 2014 EU budget.
- **Iceland and Croatia** continue to pursue EU membership with a slowing in the Icelandic negotiations but swift progress for Croatia.

- 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. Fears are easing of a second recession in the US and the EU – but a desperate search for methods to increase GDP remains at the centre of international thinking.
- The Germans closure of seven **nuclear power** stations has become a major new factor in the debate about the nuclear industry's resurgence – and was followed by decisions to abandon nuclear power or its development in Switzerland, Italy and Japan. This major narrowing of the market casts serious shadows over the British Government's hopes as they are adversely affected by fewer economies of scale open to the nuclear corporates. Eon and DWE have followed SSE and Scottish Power in leaving the market.
- **IUCN Regional Director for Europe**, Dr Hans Friederich, came to the **LINK Congress** on 17th November 2011 to hear the views of members on priorities for the IUCN Nature+ programme for 2013-16.

The Chief and Parliamentary Officers have continued to make efforts to improve UK involvement in the **European Environment Bureau** (EEB) – and the ability of EEB members inside the UK to input to EEB discussions. Progress has been made towards understanding the potential for LINK (together with WCL and other UK interests) to maximise inputs 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 early 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 10.04.12