

For LINK internal consideration

LINK Climate and Energy Review

Report to LINK commissioning group

20 October 2015

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1. Introduction

Scottish Environment LINK last set out a position paper on climate change in 2005, which in time developed into the report, *Time for Change*, in 2008. That document supported LINK's efforts to influence the Climate Change (Scotland) Act (2009). Since then, various LINK task forces have advocated policy change or development on related issues (the planning framework, climate adaptation, landscape policy, strategy for development of marine renewables). However there has not been a climate change or energy task force since 2010 to guide this work, in part due to differing views over renewables policies, in particular onshore windfarms. A climate adaptation task force (in hibernation since 2014) was formed to influence the government's climate adaptation strategy.

The LINK Board commissioned this work to review the current context and explore the possibility of developing a new consensus statement on climate change and energy. The review takes account of the latest knowledge regarding climate change, the challenge in meeting Scotland's targets, and the rapid development of new, low carbon technologies. LINK's particular interest is in how Scotland can meet this challenge consistent with sustainable development principles, and make the transition to a successful, low carbon future.

This report sets out how the review process addressed the following specific aims of the review:

- **Improve mutual understanding:** support members to achieve a common understanding of the broad contexts, and the reasons for concern in individual member bodies, in relation to climate and energy.
- **Benefits of discussion and consensus:** achieve an understanding of the benefits of a broad consensus view on this issue, while recognising there will be some diversity of views and priorities.
- **Outline consensus statement:** provide the basis of a consensus statement which could strengthen LINK's credibility, influence and provide constructive commentary on today's challenges.

The report outlines the approach taken to the review, provides headline findings from the research, and a full report of a workshop held with a small number of member bodies. The report concludes with the consultants' own analysis of the prospects for building consensus, suggestions for possible opportunities for LINK work on climate and energy, and recommendations for next steps in taking this work forward.

2. Approach

The three -stage review was designed to involve all member bodies of LINK, but also to work with a smaller cohort of members to start the process of consensus building.

An **online survey** was conducted to understand member views on the value of consensus (for LINK, their own organisation, and the cause), as well as their level of commitment to the review process. The survey also asked questions about their organisation's position on climate and energy, and asked members to identify possible areas of common ground, and areas of difference.

Follow-up telephone interviews were then conducted with representatives of a sample of organisations covering the full range of views on this topic within LINK. This allowed for more in-depth discussions on the level of mutual understanding, views on the benefits of consensus, and generated a list of core principles which could be used as a starter for a consensus document. Some external individuals closely involved in these issues were also consulted, to provide an outsiders' view of LINK and their perspective on the need for a LINK consensus on this topic.

Finally a **workshop** involved all the LINK interviewees; its design and content was informed by the online survey and all the telephone interviews, including the outsiders' views.

3. Main Findings – Survey and Interviews

3.1 Survey

18 member organisations participated in the survey (see annex 1), representing the full range of opinion on the climate and energy topic. Some member organisations opted out as they felt other organisations would represent their interests and/or the issue was not core to their work.

The survey results revealed strong support for this process and provide encouragement that there is real scope for progress.

3.1.1 Key survey results¹:

Quantitative results

Value of consensus - beneficial though not essential

- Very nearly all say that a consensus position on climate and energy would make the network more credible and effective.
- Most agree that their organisation would benefit from participation in a LINK-wide consensus on climate and energy.
- All agree that consensus would require some flexibility in individual positions.
- Very nearly all say that their organisation would commit to this process in good faith.

Knowledge and experience of climate and energy is mixed

- Approximately 50% thought the issue of climate and energy was core to their organisation's work, with 44% at 'middling'.
- Nearly one quarter had no position on this issue. A further 12% have a position but it has not been reviewed for 5 years or more, if at all.
- 25% were not aware of differences within LINK on this issue, though 45% were aware of major differences, and 30% of minor differences.
- There is recognition of the need for respect and mutual understanding.

Main effort largely at principles level

- Most (77%) work at a 'high principles' level, with 60% working on policy proposals, and 50% on specific technologies.

¹ Full quantitative survey results are provided in annex 2

- Just over half work on awareness-raising, and between 25-30% on education and behaviour change.

Starting point for consensus

The survey responses revealed there was significant agreement on some basic principles which could form a foundation for a consensus statement (see annex 2). The responses also suggested there is an appetite to look at shared positions on new technologies or different topic areas (e.g. renewable heat) – or at the very least to use LINK as a forum to increase knowledge of these technologies.

Organisational differences

The capacity of small NGOs can be a limitation. For example, some rely solely on volunteers, and there is no time to develop detailed position papers, or review all contributions from their volunteers for consistency. They also have less experience participating in LINK, so can be less familiar with the value of joint LINK working.

Outliers

It is worth noting that the John Muir Trust and the Mountaineering Council of Scotland, which represent one end of the spectrum of views, have withdrawn from membership of LINK and therefore have not been part of this process. However, it may be that the outcomes of this review could provide a stepping stone for encouraging these organisations to join in the dialogue and take part in the next phase.

3.2 Interviews

Based on the survey, nine organisations were selected for follow-up interview: APRS, FOES, MCS, RAS, RSPB, SCNP, SWLG, NTS and WWF (see annex 1). These organisations expressed a willingness to participate in the process, offered interesting and useful responses to the survey, and together represent the spectrum of views within LINK from climate-led through to landscape-led.

The key findings from the interviews are:

Value of consensus

- Strong support for continuing the discussion through a workshop to explore a consensus
- Their experience suggests there is potential value of a consensus statement for:
 - individual bodies (increasing influence by aligning with others, especially if others have complementary expertise; don't like their expertise to be rubbished by fellow member bodies in public; would help to reconcile differences of opinion *within* member bodies);
 - LINK (better profile of consistent approach);
 - The cause (improves reputation if not contradicting ourselves on basics, and the public deserves not to be confused by contradictory views being expressed with great authority; and LINK bodies – free of influence of power or profit – enjoy public trust; better consensus could underpin much more constructive support for renewables, with global benefits);
- LINK's special contribution to this issue is about the impact on nature and connection with adaptation;
- Important to get LINK on the front foot as challenges continue/increase.

Starting point for consensus

All those interviewed were consulted on the basic principles of a consensus statement that emerged from the survey (annex 2). The following comments were made:

- Need to be realistic about limits to potential for consensus – bodies will disagree on specifics, and modifying individual strident and disrespectful behaviour is a key issue (although times have changed and current leadership in organisations could mean this is less of a concern);
- Clearly potential for improving mutual understanding and respect, and there are some major gaps which have emerged through the interviews. One or two are sceptical regarding the value of a consensus statement, and feel the main value of the process will be addressing disagreements;
- The core principles (annex 3) were agreed as the basis for the workshop and a potential consensus statement;
- Consensus should guide positions, and provide the basis for exploring consensus on further issues, egg technologies or pathways to a zero carbon Scotland;
- The aim should be to start at a strategic level, and look for win-wins;
- The Avoiding Conflicts in the Marine Environment (ACME)² report was highlighted as a successful statement of consensus among marine task force members which could be a possible model for wider use;
- It would be useful to time the consensus to appear before the climate conference in Paris and the Holyrood elections.

Also Noted:

- One respondent was concerned that the Board was acting beyond its brief in initiating this process and it should stick to responding to the needs of task forces.

3.3 External interviews

To supplement the views of members, the consultants felt it would be helpful to explore perceptions of external observers and commentators regarding LINK's coherence on climate and energy issues. We conducted several informal (and off the record) interviews with individuals from government, industry, and agencies working in this area to understand how important it is for LINK bodies to 'sing from the same hymn sheet' and why.

The feedback from externals was universal that a LINK consensus would be a useful contribution to the debate. Indeed, several were clearly frustrated and disappointed that LINK didn't (or couldn't) form such a consensus. To sum up their views, the feeling was – *'LINK's influence is weaker without a consensus'*, *'if LINK doesn't lead, who will?'* and *'surely consensus is core business for LINK?'*

There were also some useful suggestions as to where LINK could focus its effort going forward:

- Acknowledge the tension between climate change and landscape and present a rational articulation of the opposing arguments to inform a public debate as to where the line should be drawn.
- Develop the debate about the impact of climate change on nature and wildlife in Scotland, which could resonate with and motivate people.
- Frame the debate in terms of the future energy system – egg energy storage, linking generation with heating and transport, local resilience – rather than a binary dispute between climate and landscape.

² Avoiding Conflicts in the Marine Environment, LINK 2010

4. Workshop

The workshop represented an important milestone towards achieving a consensus statement on climate and energy. However, all participants agreed that in a sense, the conversation had just begun, and some need to be convinced that the result will be worth the effort. In addition, more thought needs to be given to identifying LINK's added value in this debate, and how such a statement would be used. In summary, significant time and effort will be required to achieve a consensus statement which would be credible, influential, and win the support of all LINK members.

The workshop achieved the following outputs:

- Understanding of the benefits of consensus and LINK's added value to the climate and energy debate.
- Draft outline consensus statement, with headline principles and suggested statements to elaborate each principle.
- A list of areas for further discussion which could extend the common ground amongst LINK members.

There was agreement amongst the participants that the process should be continued in order to complete a draft statement for internal use as a starting point. The results of the process thus far, and in particular the outline statement drafted during this workshop, provide a useful foundation for these discussions.

The full workshop report is attached as annex 4.

5. Analysis and recommendations

5.1 Wider benefits

- It seemed that most participants felt some benefit from the three stages of the review, re-establishing their relationship to a common cause within LINK, and revealing that further efforts in this direction could be worthwhile if it can be agreed that 'the prize is big enough'.
- This could be a healing process for LINK; internal relations have suffered from the divisions over onshore windfarms. A lot has changed since consensus broke down – both within LINK and the external context. Members might surprise themselves how much common ground there is, especially if we consider the bigger picture and don't just focus on wind. This is a significant existential challenge for LINK – reflected in the Board's decision to commission this review – deserving continued effort.
- An additional benefit could be informing and strengthening the Stop Climate Chaos Coalition with LINK's clarity on the environmental rationale for action on climate change.
- It is also a moment of historic significance for the cause. The prize is huge. Standing right back, it is hard to see what history would make of any failure by LINK to maximise its influence in response to the greatest environmental challenge of the century.

5.2 Opportunities

- There appear to be opportunities for new (and quite radical) messaging around the transition to zero carbon future, no more fossil fuels, and a new energy system that would be a contribution to debate.
- A high-level statement could open doors (or provide a framework and legitimacy) for further discussion on climate and energy issues, and where appropriate taking positions – though this should be on a needs basis and where there is member interest.

- The workshop participants represent a wealth of experience and knowledge on climate and energy issues for LINK. Working together, they could be a very powerful set of signatures to a consensus statement, along with the support of the wider network.

5.3 Process and tactics

- As regards future tactics, two points of view emerged:
 - 1) leapfrog or set aside the windfarm debate (too difficult to agree, and distracting from the bigger issues we all share) and reach to a higher level for consensus – talk about new energy system, heat, transport; OR
 - 2) continue to discuss the windfarm issue as it is the source of division, locus for many LINK bodies, and will keep coming back to bite LINK if it is not resolved.
- We feel it would be sensible to start with a new consensus statement, even at a high level, as this re-framing is undoubtedly needed (it may also create confidence to look at wind energy as a next stage). In our opinion, if LINK focused on ‘the wind debate’, LINK will appear blinkered, obsessed with a single issue, out of touch and out of date – in addition to ending up in a cul-de-sac.
- A high-level statement could be a good basis for returning to JMT/MCofS to inform them and invite comment (at least).
- The process will need stronger leadership from LINK Board, President, Task Forces and the large ENGOs to ensure any further process has sufficient commitment.

5.4 Mutual understanding:

- Representatives understand each other’s views at a superficial level, but there would be benefit from learning more and also how we (as LINK and as individual member organisations) come across. This is a complex area, but it is crucial to the way the network is perceived ‘out there’, and therefore how it influences the debate.
- It is important to note that some members (from both ‘ends of the spectrum’) still question the validity of each other’s positions – in other words, do not appear to recognise the legitimacy of their viewpoint and their constituency of support or even the tactical value of acknowledging them more explicitly. So, even if they understand each other, the dispute is about how they disregard each other in their public messaging. This issue would need to be addressed to develop trust, respect and understanding – and affirm commitment to LINK’s ‘shared endeavour’ to safeguard the environment.
- One approach to encourage shared learning could come through exploring some of the less controversial issues – like a new energy system. However, even this discussion will need to touch on wind energy in terms of taking a view on the balance of energy sources required to meet targets. But addressing this in the context of a bigger shared agenda could be more productive.

5.5 Mandate for consensus:

- All agreed that an internal consensus statement would be useful for LINK and its members to use as a guide and framework for related work as required. This suggests a mandate for the process to continue, at least to the point of producing an internal statement. This view is supported by external consultees who were disappointed and frustrated that LINK had not been able to forge a consensus and (for example) provide an articulate position that balances climate change and landscape concerns.
- In terms of an external statement, wholehearted engagement may be achievable if the participants can be convinced of their combined influence and of the specific opportunities to wield it. Some more sceptical members were surprised by the views of external

consultees, and would likely need more evidence of external perspectives of ENGOs and how they could enhance their credibility and influence.

- The benefits statement provided in the workshop report is important to help motivate participants and give a strong rationale for those with less direct experience with LINK work (e.g. board members, steering groups) – and remind LINK of one of its core purposes.

5.6 Outline consensus statement

- A basic outline for a statement is provided in the workshop report, section 4.6. This could be worked up into a short statement adding in the ‘areas for agreement’ set out in the workshop report. This version could be shared with the wider membership for discussion (and approval).
- We believe one issue that should be resolved for the initial statement would be around the term ‘moral responsibility’ and what it means for Scotland. The other topics could be prioritised by a small group to see if some could be agreed and added to the statement, and if not, what further action is needed.
- Some expressed interest in developing LINK criteria or principles in relation to siting of renewables. It may be possible for LINK to adopt some common evidence on wind turbines (eg ClimateXChange research³) so at least it is not helping to perpetuate a myth that wind power does not save carbon. However, it is uncertain if more effort on siting principles would bear fruit, and it could mean the bigger picture of climate and energy is in danger of being ignored. In our view, it may be more profitable to explore other issues related to renewables / technologies development that are coming up the agenda and are particularly relevant to LINK.

5.7 Landscape Task Force statement on energy

- There is understandable reluctance on the part of the Landscape Task Force to tinker with this joint statement which has been more than two years in the making. However, it is our view that publishing and using this statement externally would undermine (and possibly derail) this wider review process. Instead, taking cognizance of the consensus building effort, and amending the statement so that it fits within the wider climate and energy statement would be consistent with the spirit of common cause which has suffered from recent divisions.
- There is also concern that the task force statement would likewise lose credibility if it appears subsequently out of step with a LINK consensus. Given where we are, it would seem best to proceed not on the basis of how much time has been put in, but how well the two statements mesh – that will be key to their influence. This will inevitably cause delays, which will be seen as a problem by the task force given the desire to use the statement to influence manifestoes.
- Ideally the task force should wait until the internal consensus document is agreed, and then the task force statement could be amended as the members see fit. The resulting combination could strengthen the network and its reputation greatly.

³ Assessing the life-cycle costs and carbon emissions of wind power, June 2015, ClimateXChange <http://www.climatexchange.org.uk/reducing-emissions/assessing-life-cycle-costs-and-carbon-emissions-wind-power/>

6. Recommendations

6.1 Recommendations for the LINK Board

6.1.1 As a first step, reflecting on this review, the LINK Board needs to seek internal agreement on a decision to proceed with a consensus statement. This will almost certainly depend on identifying a particular policy target and timescale to galvanise action. In our view, this internal consensus statement is badly needed and achievable, and could provide the motivation to resolve other concerns around mutual understanding and commitment to LINK's shared endeavour.

6.1.2 The LINK Board should establish a mechanism (with strong support from members) to take the consensus building process forward – and to consider how the consensus could be used and developed. This will require something like a task force or core group representing the spectrum of opinion.

6.1.3 The forthcoming LINK AGM and Strategic Planning Day provide a timely opportunity to get feedback and agreement from members to take this initiative forward, with support from the LINK Board, staff, and consultants as required.

6.1.4 The Board can provide a useful role of liaising with other relevant task forces which have an interest in climate and energy policy. It should guide the core group (referencing its operating principles⁴ on consensus), and can assist with bringing proposals forward to the wider membership. This might involve a workshop or discussion session for the full membership to encourage broad commitment to this important issue.

6.2 Recommendations for the 'core group' (or other mechanism)

We suggest the following tasks for the core group, though of course the group will have its own thoughts on how to organise its work.

6.2.1 Internal consensus statement

The core group should be tasked by the Board to complete an *internal* consensus statement on climate and energy, starting from the outline statement developed at the workshop. A shared purpose and timetable should be agreed to ensure momentum is not lost, and so the statement will be useful in the context of the Paris COP and Holyrood elections in May 2016.

To ensure a common rationale, the group should start by accepting the points in the statement on the benefits of consensus (workshop report, section 3.4). The group should also reflect on the role of LINK as a network and how this relates to LINK's operating principles and the wider discussions on LINK's strategy that are underway.

Some of the issues under 'areas for discussion' in the workshop report may be easily agreed and could be added to the internal statement. We believe the statement should include something on 'moral responsibility' and its rationale. Once the statement is agreed, the group will need to work with the Board to create a means for presenting the proposed statement to the wider membership.

6.2.2 Further understanding

To further understanding of 'how others see us' and LINK's added value in the climate and energy debate, any sceptical core group participants could be encouraged to ask their own key contacts – and beyond - about the value of a LINK consensus.

⁴ Scottish Environment LINK operating principles, August 2015

We argue that this value lies in the range of benefits described above - not just for 'LINK' but for the influence of the 'network' (i.e. the whole group of ENGOs – including JMT etc. - as perceived by outsiders) and for the 'cause' of the environment as a whole (bigger still), with LINK performing an important de facto role as the steward of the reputation of this community of interest.

LINK needs to respond to the evidence that some members do not accept the validity of other organisations' positions, and are engaging in this process only to advance their individual organisation's interests, rather than committing to the LINK network and the larger cause of the environment as a whole. This issue will likely stand in the way of the core group developing a bold and inspiring consensus for external use.

Therefore, we recommend some 1:1 discussions (probably best facilitated by a consultant), which can then be shared with the core group, as part of the bigger task to further develop the consensus.

6.2.3 Developing the consensus further

Depending on the success of the internal consensus statement, the core group could also be tasked with prioritising the list of 'areas for discussion' in the workshop report based on the potential to establish common ground. If not, the group could decide if LINK should help raise awareness and understanding on some issues. Where there is no agreement, the group could recommend if it is necessary / useful for LINK to set out the different views. Finally, some areas could be considered of low priority or no interest.

As part of the prioritisation exercise, the core group should identify external opportunities in the next 12 months where LINK input would have the most added value and influence. Some of the issues that came up during the workshop discussion that seemed worthy of consideration were: position on new energy system, no to new fossil fuels, extraction and North Sea oil, and review of planning system. Recent research from member bodies on climate and energy should be shared as it could provide a useful input to the process.

The core group may also wish to use the ACME report as a reference. Some of the key recommendations from ACME that might be relevant are (adapted for use in this context):

- Acknowledge need for renewables development;
- Acknowledge importance of environment – by government and industry;
- Independent committee – audit research, assessments and advice;
- Resources for science and regulatory bodies for assessments;
- Strategy-led consenting process;
- Identifying and protecting sensitive sites;
- Adaptive management – review strategy at regular intervals;
- Support balanced stakeholder engagement, including communities;
- Enhance biodiversity and environment through design.

If there is a mandate from the LINK Board and membership to proceed with a certain number of priority issues, the core group could initiate a consensus-building process to expand the areas of common ground, and recommend how to take the other issues forward.

6.2.4 LINK principles on siting of renewables developments

Some members of the core group may wish to explore the potential to develop LINK principles or criteria on the siting of renewables. We understand that there is some unease that this issue remains unresolved, but our advice is to focus on the bigger picture (as noted in 5.4) where more gains can be made. We believe that given the reference point of a common statement, the

differences of view on individual developments will be less significant when set within a set of joint overarching principles.

6.2.5 Landscape Task Force statement on energy

As noted in section 5.5, we recommend the task force should wait until the internal consensus document is agreed, and then amend their statement to ensure consistency. The result could be a model for other task forces, using the broader climate and energy statement as a framework for developing more detailed positions on particular issues.

6.2.6 Briefing former LINK members

Representative(s) of LINK should brief JMT and MCofS of progress to date so there are no surprises and to give them space to consider participation at a later stage.

6.3 Recommendations for the role of independent consultants

We believe the process has reached a point where a core group needs to take the lead in the consensus-building process. Independent consultants could provide a useful function in supporting the process, namely:

- Facilitating and advising the core group;
- Mediating discussions between smaller group (s) of members (see 6.2.2);
- Supporting and advising the Landscape Task Force;
- Supporting and advising the LINK Board.

It is important that the resulting consensus is crafted by the collective body of LINK members, and not consultants, to ensure ownership of the statement and a sense of shared purpose in its use.

7. Conclusion

This review has identified a desire amongst LINK members for a consensus statement on climate and energy. Through a survey, interviews and a workshop, a set of principles have been agreed which could form the basis of such a statement. The workshop participants agreed that LINK should proceed with developing an internal statement which could win the approval of the wider LINK membership. We have set out a series of recommendations for the LINK Board, a core group, and independent consultants (in a supporting role) could play. We believe it is vital for LINK to maintain the momentum and set up a process and timetable for developing an internal statement without delay.

The internal statement alone would be a worthwhile outcome of the process. It will renew common cause within LINK on climate and energy, overcoming divisions which have damaged relations within LINK for several years. It will provide a framework and reference point for member bodies, and an opening for collaboration on upcoming topics relating to the transition to a low carbon Scotland. It could evolve into an external consensus statement if it is sufficiently bold and inspirational. However, this will depend on the willingness of members to commit the leadership, time and resources necessary to produce something that is more than the 'lowest common denominator'.

The reality is that significant work remains to be done to convince some members of the added value of a LINK consensus and collective work on this topic. In addition, though some progress has been made in understanding each other's (and external) perspectives, significant gaps remain which will need to be addressed to restore trust and respect amongst members. It is important that LINK address these concerns, not only for this process, but for the wider benefit of the network and the environmental cause.

As a final comment, we find it difficult to imagine that LINK would *not* step forward and make its voice heard in response to the massive challenge that climate change poses Scotland's environment and people and we urge the network to grasp the opportunity to engage collectively on this issue.

ANNEX 1

Participating organisations in the survey

APRS
ARC-Trust
British Ecological Society
Buglife
Cairngorms Campaign
Friends of the Earth
HWDT
MCS
NTS
Planning Democracy
RSPB
Ramblers Scotland
Scottish Allotments and Gardens Society
SCNP
Scottish Wild Land Group
SWT
WDCS
WWF Scotland

Participants in the interviews and workshop

Mary Church (FOES)
Calum Duncan (MCS)
Sam Gardner (WWF Scotland)
Diarmid Hearn (NTS)
Beryl Leatherland (SWLG)
John Mayhew (APRS);
Alexa Morrison (RSPB)
John Thomson (SCNP);
Helen Todd (Ramblers Scotland)

ANNEX 2

Quantitative results of survey (Separate PDF attachment)

ANNEX 3

LINK climate and energy workshop

6 October 2015

Suggested core principles to prompt discussion at workshop

(Drawn from survey results and interviews)

- 1. Climate change is real, largely anthropogenic and a major threat to people and the environment.**
- 2. Scotland needs a transition to a sustainable, low carbon economy (a “zero carbon future”) through:**
 - Aligning development with the robust and binding climate targets as set out in the Climate Change (Scotland) Act.
 - Action to ensure we meet these targets year on year.
- 3. Action on energy should be part of this transition, requiring:**
 - Energy efficiency and demand reduction.
 - General move away from fossil fuels, through more actions on:
 - Energy efficiency and demand reduction.
 - Decarbonisation of the power sector, heat generation and transport.
 - Renewable energy technologies are part of the solution but avoiding significant harm to wildlife, habitats and landscapes through strategic planning, sensitive siting and robust EIA.
- 4. Adaptation is also a priority to minimise the impacts of inevitable climate change (but outside the scope of this review).**

ANNEX 4

Workshop report

(Separate word document attachment)