

Note of discussion and outcomes of the LINK Network meeting held on 16 January in the Perth office.

Attending: Deborah Long (Chair, Plantlife, Wildlife Forum TFC), Paul Walton (trustee, RSPB, WF), Charles Dundas (trustee, Woodland Trust, Woodland TFC), Craig Macadam (trustee, Buglife, WF), Beryl Leatherland (trustee, Scottish Wild Land Group, Planning/Landscape TFs, Hilltracks project), Mandy Orr (trustee), Ross Finnie (President), Helen Todd (Vice-Chair, Ramblers, Land group, PTF, LTF, Hilltracks project), Lisa Webb (RSPB, Freshwater TFC), Pete Minting (Amphibian & Reptile Conservation), Gus Jones (Badenoch & Strathspey Conservation Group, National Parks TF), Eva Groenfeld (WWF, Governance group, Parl Forum), Matthew Crighton (Friends of the Earth, Economics TFC), Aedán Smith (RSPB, Planning TFC), Calum Duncan (Marine Conservation Society, Marine TFC), John Mayhew (Assoc for the Protection of Rural Scotland, PTF, LTF), Jen Anderson (LINK Chief Officer), Andy Myles (LINK Parliamentary Officer), Alice Walsh (LINK Development Officer), Esther Brooks (Marine project officer).

1. **Apologies** received from Jenny Mollison (SAGS), Guy Harewood (SCRA), Vicki Swales (RSPB), Jim Densham (Climate Adaptation TF), John Thomson (Landscape TF), Jonathan Wordsworth (AS).
2. **Board Updates:** It has been busy with follow up of the AGM and induction of new trustees and project staff. Changes ahead in 2014: Deborah Long would step down from the board and as chair in November, and Ross Finnie's 3 year term as President would be completed. SNH funding was assured for 2014-15 at the same rate as for the current year.
3. **Network Planning for 2014 into 2015**
Key issues and what can be resourced: following up November's Strategic Planning meeting and considering issues raised too from the Board's horizon-scanning in October and the Political Strategy Report. The Board had considered the whole and identified top issues as:
Landscape and Energy Statement – the Landscape TF was asked to bring this to a conclusion (outstanding from 2012), **Environmental Narrative** – a board sub-group led by Paul Walton will prepare a mini manifesto for sustainable development to counter the sustainable economic growth agenda, followed by development of an advocacy strategy (from environmental summit in 2012, corporate strategy, strategic planning meeting). Some assistance from discretionary project fund (DPF) may be needed; **Carbon accounting**– the board will write to members to remind them of key issues (from corporate strategy); **Carbon Bubble** – setting out the issues for Scotland, some DPF assistance allocated and brief to be circulated for input (political strategy report). The **Local Communities** Study would be completed by March and the recommendations considered at the April board meeting (political strategy report, Congress/Strategic Planning). Several other issues raised in these forums within the remits of other LINK groups (Governance, Planning, Wildlife Forum, Economics) and would be factored in there. Additional effort would be focussed on where there would be added value to members' work. Staff capacity was at full stretch. DPF remaining for this financial year was £1.8k and for next financial year would be 10k. These priorities were broadly supported by the meeting.

Task Force updates on forward plans and focussing on: planned initiatives, events, campaigns, briefings or statements; where is the scope for contradiction or overlap with other LINK TFs or efforts; any evidence or inquiries in which TF to be involved.

Agriculture: Not represented at the meeting. The TF vision document was being taken forward internally. The second SRDP consultation was out and a response underway, WTF inputting. Paul Walton noted that LINK is on the inside track wrt biodiversity targets for the SRDP. The Interim Pack Proposals will need a coordinated response from several TFs including **Agriculture** and **Sustainable Land Use**.

Climate Adaptation Jim Densham had emailed a report: Our main task has remained influencing the Scottish Adaptation Programme. The following points are of note; JD gave evidence to RACCE in November on climate adaptation; LINK responded to the SG consultation and met with officials to discuss our main points of concern; We provided a briefing ahead of the parliamentary Debate 14 January. LINK and JD's evidence was mentioned or referred to by a number of speakers. We now await publication of the Programme and have offered support to Government in launching it, eg a reserve visit of other where issues could be discussed.

Energy issues Members were reminded that [A Time to Act on Climate Change](#) (2008) (copies tabled) was well supported by members. In terms of LINK energy statements that is a key one. There is a lot of common ground, and in [Avoiding Conflicts in the Marine Environment](#) though it too needs revisiting. Marine TF would like to do so in 2014. **Action: Member bodies** asked to come back to LINK on where they think ATtAoCC needs to be updated.

Economics TF taking stock. New 3 day week LINK Flourishing Scotland Advocacy Officer, Phoebe Cochrane has just started, based at FoES in Edinburgh. The 2011 joint briefing on the National Performance Framework was updated, working with partners Carnegie, STUC and Oxfam, to be published before the next NPF review group meeting on 27/2. TF doing a SWOT analysis on various work areas, other measures of wellbeing and sustainability, preparing a position paper for LINK to map work out for the future; will scan economic areas across the TFs, what is bothering them; scope out issues around Natural Capital for members. It is significant that LINK has this resource and is taking a lead in civic Scotland. It is important to get our act together rather than shouting from the rooftops. The NPF roundtable has spawned 3 sub-groups; LINK is on the Indicators group, though could not attend the first meeting.

Freshwater has been operating at low capacity (Lisa Webb and Alex Kinninmonth), and good that ARC and WWT on board. Will be responding to a consultation on environmental standards, how water bodies are classified, issue of how data is presented. Now moving into the 2nd cycle of river basin management plans, pre-[consultations from SEPA](#) on how well it met the challenge so far, and next ones. **Will need help from Agriculture and Marine TFs**. Lisa will be leaving RSPB in April, her replacement will not necessarily step up to FWTF convenor. SEPA has published [flood maps](#) for Scotland where there is potential for natural flood management, a useful step.

Governance Group met recently. Two events planned; first 23 Jan workshop for members about how constitutional options may affect the operations of charities and also touching on referendum matters for UK colleagues' benefit, and a question time event on 26 February for the Yes/Better Together campaigns. The group has been involved in the Westminster Lobbying bill; on the boundaries between charities and subsidiaries of government, general trends to clip the wings of NGOs.

Land Group: Submissions were made to the Land Reform Review Group and the Scottish Affairs Committee, (though still not met the LRRG). Our focus is on sustainable land use in the public interest, and this is accepted by other stakeholders. Andy Myles noted that we are on the front foot, the issue is rising up the agenda, related to the Deer TF work calling on major reform of deer management, wildlife crime and the Hill Tracks campaign, all acute issues.

Landscape John Mayhew updated on status of the energy statement, recapping on the history; MCoFS had left LINK over the windfarm issue, most members agreed to differ, a position statement was drafted which 5 members supported. The Board, aware of difficulties, helped arrange a wider meeting of members, (November 2012), which was good, established the extent of common ground and faultlines. Subsequent comments from WWF, RSPB and the Marine TF were extensive, and could not be accommodated. John Mayhew stopped working on it, Beryl Leatherland took over, lots of scope issues emerging, so its not there yet, getting longer and more complicated, while the energy debate widens. Meantime NTS and MCoFS with some other member bodies put out a joint statement, which had some policy impact. John M would take back to the meeting that the board wished there to be a conclusion to it. John Thomson's email wrt the prospect of agreement and management of divergence was noted.

Marine Esther Brooks was introduced, now 4 days into post. Calum Duncan explained how the TFs work divided between the two 4-day week marine policy and advocacy posts (Esther Brooks and Nick Underdown), who focus on the MPAs and the National Marine Plan, huge consultations completed in November. Now looking at other's positions, Scottish Fishermen's Federation a particular issue. Trying to avoid a 'fishfight' and seeing how concerned Marine Scotland are wrt SFF picking at fundamentals of the Act. MPA sites are still needed for seabirds and cetaceans, TF is working with the other links on the coherence of the network across the UK. The NMP as drafted did not meet commitments of the Act, will pick up on that limited ambition. Advocacy strategy - want RACCE scrutiny on MPAs and NMP. The TF is stocktaking collective concerns around sectoral issues and on engagement, and plans to update the Rolling Manifesto.

National Parks Gus Jones updated the meeting on the progress of the legal challenge, which had some positive aspects. The next local development plan for the Cairngorms NPA was with the Reporters Office, there were some challenges that NGOs are not directly involved with. There were a lot more responses to this plan.

BSCG would like support on green bridges for the A9 upgrade. The Cairngorm Nature Action Plan has not resulted in any action. A consultation was held on a similar one in the LLTPNPA. LINK met CNPA in the autumn, it was keen that member bodies are taking positively about the action plan. BSCG promoting it at every opportunity. CNPA is putting in Environmental Assessments in response to the charge that there was inadequate assessment on the effect of the Camus Mor development on species. It has rewritten the Park Plan to dilute aspirations. Beryl Leatherland noted the limitations of 'appropriate' assessment, that needs raising more widely. This meeting agreed that a further meeting of members/TFs was needed to evaluate all the issues, which are complicated. **Action: Planning TF with staff assistance.**

John Mayhew noted that a reason for setting up the NPTF was to revive ideas for more National Parks. Unfinished Business was published in April 2013, the project is finished though APRS/SCNP are moving to advocacy mode, and will be looking for other members support.

Andy noted that we have been trying to get **commitments** to new NPs **into manifestos**, and that all TFs should be considering their asks.

Planning has been busy with consultations on SPP, with success in retaining sustainable development in the Scottish Planning Policy. A second SPP consultation on 'Sustainable Economic Growth' and 'Sustainable Development' came out in December, LINK supportive of removal of separate section on SEG - will see what results. [Open cast coal mines](#) consultation, no money for restoration, principle applies to other developments, eg windfarms - PTF responding. Priority is NPF3, 60 days of Parliamentary scrutiny raised 14/1, wide ranging and of interest to 4 committees, Local Government Cttee leading. Need to plan LINK response and how not to contradict each other, use what is already agreed in our submission as a starting point. LINK/Members invited to give evidence to 3 cttees. PTF meeting 20 Jan. The NPF is a decent government document, and can be drawn on for other arguments. Two new national developments in it meaning the need for them cannot be challenged: broadband network unlikely to be controversial though may be specific issues, and hydro pump storage schemes which will be difficult for some organisations.

On hilltracks project Helen Todd reported there was a meeting with the minister planned and a meeting with Forestry Commission. Letter sent to supporters from Scottish Government in relation to the problem and LINK's report were so far unhelpful.

Parliamentary Forum The chief aim of the forum is professional support for people, dates are circulated and all are welcome. Eva Groenfeld noted that for elections this year the PF is creating a crossover with the Governance Group for input to manifestos and party conferences. On the Regulatory Reform Bill there has been no backing down on imposing duties to further Sustainable Economic Growth on agencies; next step is to challenge the meaning of SEG.

SEFF No representation at the meeting.

Wildlife Crime Eddie Palmer reported that the report is progressing, the focus is on crime visible to the public though other crime is not ignored. Lots of noise was being generated around the issues now. Potential issues arise with members who sit on PAWS though Eddie will discuss with them before publication.

Wildlife Forum LINK reps are on all but 2 of the delivery structures for the refreshed Scottish Biodiversity Strategy. Exceptions are Protected Areas (all agencies) and Marine (working to change this). WF may need further MTF input. Species Champions video launched in Parliament. Good EU legislation on Invasive Species coming, with UK being constructive; SGov part of a GB partnership. WANE Act means Scotland is ahead of the game. WF and WCL have concurring positions.

Woodland Charles Dundas reported that the discussion paper started by Angus Yarwood looking at FC futures was ready. WTF is working with the Governance Group on structure, will liaise with the Minister and FC on our views for best environmental outcomes. TF meets shortly, will input on parts of SRDP to the Agriculture TF. Government's survey of native woodland in Scotland is out,, a superb piece of work, useful tool, concerns about what will happen now, got commitment from minister for an action plan.

f. **Referendum Challenge plans** – covered in the accompanying paper. Governance Group had decided against an analysis of responses, which mainly relate to policy rather than constitutional issues. We will use the debate on 26 February for our questions.

g. **Manifesto timeline and consultation process** : The online manifesto is a tool for TFs and member bodies. Andy urged all TFs to get involved and contribute. As well as contributing to the manifestos TF would need to meet the parties to follow up, bring it alive and appeal to them. Andy was happy to come to TF meetings to explain the benefits. **Action: All TFs, Andy**

h. **Workshops ahead** – Constitution & Charities 23 January ; Peat workshop 21 February, with the Peatland Programme coming to an end to look at the issues of peatland restoration and peat use, and discuss what LINK/members can take forward; Natural capital, to be developed by the Economics TF. **Action: all will be emailed.**

i. **Ministerial agenda 26 February**, covering environmental tribunals (Mary Church), Biodiversity (Deborah Long), CAP and SRDP if required beyond G6 (Diarmid Hearn), National Performance Framework (Aedán Smith). Potential to add item on Marine (standing by Act)? Further meetings are scheduled for 3 June and 11 November. **Action: contact Jen with items for future meetings.**

4. Evaluation TFs will get a pro-forma before the end of March for a progress report/ evaluation for last 6 months.

5. AOB

Lisa Webb was thanked for her tremendous work convening the Freshwater task force.

Next Network meetings 17 April and 14 August.