**LINK Land Group meeting held on 21 March 2019 at Dolphin House, Edinburgh.**

**Attending:** Vicki Swales (RSPB, Convenor), Diarmid Hearns (NTS, Vice-Convenor), Beryl Leatherland (SWLG, Hilltracks Campaign), John Thomson (SCNP, Land Reform, Land Use, Landscape), Craig Macadam (Buglife, Wildlife) ,Charles Dundas (Woodlands), Isobel Mercer (RSPB), Pete Ritchie (Nourish, Food & Farming), Daphne Vlastair (LINK Advocacy Manager), Alice Walsh (LINK DO).

**Apologies:** Helen Todd RA, Maggie Keegan BES, Bruce Wilson SWT, Alan McDonnell TfL, Liz Ferrell BCT

**1. Scottish Parliament ECCLR Committee Expert Witness Invitation 31 March 2019.**

Alistair Stoddart, Senior Participation Specialist at the Scottish Parliament attended the first part of the meeting to explain more about an invitation to LINK to contribute expertise to a Citizen’s Jury event over the weekend of 30/31 March 2019.

This event was a result of the Commission for Parliamentary Reform, part of moving towards a participative approach to scrutiny. The Citizens Jury of 22 people, randomly selected and representative, will come from all over Scotland for a weekend to hear about a topic and work together to come up with recommendations.

This topic **How should funding and advice for land management be designed to help improve Scotland’s natural environment?** was selected to as it fulfilled the criteria suitable for participatory democracy, including there should be a problem about the issue to solve, and it needs to affect a wide cohort of people. Should be framed as a question -how funding for land management should be spent to improve the environment in Scotland. This is a live and current issue. All Parliamentary Committees were asked for ideas, some came forward. ECCLR said there are lots of opportunity around biodiversity.

Why were ENGOS not involved so far in the planning? There was a push to do it before the end of the financial year. They recruited a steering group of experts to suggest the right people, to ensure participants have good quality evidence, so that all have trust in the process. Neither LINK nor NFUS were involved so far. They focused on academics, JHI, BES (Maggie Keegan), Maggie Gill of Aberdeen University and others from the agriculture and business sector. These suggested a cohort of speakers, where LINK names came up. There was a lot of work getting to this point.

The steering group decided who should be asked to give evidence, to enable the jury to come up with recommendations. The ECCLR committee are involved. The convenor Gillian Martin MSP will attend dinner on Friday evening with the jurists. Dinner will involve exercise in critical thinking. ECCLR members are invited to observe the proceedings. MSPs will not be involved in discussions and they will keep the participant/observer balance so as not to intimidate participants. We can log an interest in attending as observers if we wish.

This is the first event of its kind, and being done inhouse, which is cheaper than outsourcing it. This event will be examined to see its useful as a template. It helps that this is an area of uncertainty. REC is aware of it as is the Consultative Steering Group. There are plans to do more, a series of regional events on future of primary care in the North, East and West. Future events will be timelined more appropriately. There will be a report on the recommendations that will be publicly available.

This exercise was being viewed both as an exercise in citizen juries and to inform future policy for rural funding.

Daphne said we have been talking to a lot of MSPs seeking to do something similar so they are better informed when the time comes, and flagged the relevance and importance of biodiversity post 2020. Alistair was not aware of the public polling work we have done on the future of agriculture funding, so **she will share that with him**. Scottish Govt have done a similar exercise, as part of a wider research project to be launched at the Highland Show.

There are some anxieties about how balanced it will be. He explained the format. Friday, in the Parliament Members’ room for dinner, critical thinking exercises and conversation guidelines. On Saturday there will be a tour of the Parliament. Geoff Squire, JHI is the academic lead. There will be an exercise where jurists work out why the issue is important to them personally, and to society, separating private needs from societal. The second session with Kirsty Blackstock, covers multiple benefits and trade-offs, a mapping exercise, to work out what managers need to succeed and what public needs. Session 3 with Claudia Rowse, SNH on public goods, the different types and impacts on various sectors and society. Session 4 they explore other funding models. Looking at NZ, Defra model, weighing up pros and cons. Existing examples, and simplified. Taking all this together will include what they need to make their decision.

Session 4 in on non-EU models. Daphne pointed out that other countries have done excellent work within CAP constraints, and that it could be useful to look at these if we have a Remain agenda. Alistair is speaking to colleagues in SPICE too. There will be more about the models, regional or one size. Mandatory or optional, public payment, for the Sunday.

Sunday involves two sessions, one stakeholder session, Eleanor Kay, SLE and Andrew Midgley NFUS and LINK. Pitch would be the model we think works best, and aspects we think are important. Taking questions from the jurists. Facilitators will draw out differences, at the end jurists have an idea of what the different outcomes can be within different structures.

Final session is where they meet land managers. Including some farmers that have slightly different angles. Pete Ritchie is one (lived experience). A crofter, Bill Nielson, and a forester. He wants a conservationist from LINK. On session 5 he would like someone from LINK to speak on policy, big picture and reality on the groundWe undertook to provide what is needed. Short notice was a problem. Alistair will brief people fully the following week, reminding all that the jurists are lay people, not experts. *We have subsequently confirmed Daphne and Chris Bailey (RSPB) will cover.*

Vicki summarised that we supported this process, referring to the IUCN Peatland Programme inquiry run on similar, and which teased out important issues.

Pete arrived after Alistair left and summarised his approach, which will be: Here is what we get in subsidy, this is what you do to get it, and this is what it delivers. He will also cover advice, and the difficulties of finding it.

**2. Reports and plans from Subgroups.**

Land Reform, Land Use, Landscape: since the gathering in September, not a lot has happened, other than trying to galvanise Government and Land Commission into action. John has followed up with Katriona Carmichael, there is a willingness on Govt’s part to develop some experimental projects around regional Land Use Frameworks, once immediate Brexit work is over. She encouraged liaison with the Land Commission. [Its report](https://landcommission.gov.scot/wp-content/uploads/2019/03/Investigation-Issues-Large-Scale-and-Concentrated-Landownership-20190320.pdf), published the previous day has some reasonably encouraging reference to regional land use frameworks to guide future land management. **The Subgroup will follow up with both these bodies.** There are some opportunities through work on the Climate Change Bill, and potentially on Planning Bill to interest MSPs in the subject. **There are briefings to prepare, to push this forward**. There is a legal requirement to update the LUS halfway through the 5 year period which is another opportunity.

The Subgroup debated the Land Reform Commissions on land ownership concentration at today’s meeting, considering how far its possible for LINK to take a collective view, as opposed to individual members, which is not resolved. There are some issues for those that **are landowning bodies, and they will discuss** between them. Land management is of interest to all. Within the next few months **the recommendation is for a bigger LINK discussion around land reform questions on the back of the report for an internal view. Some analysis of the report is needed first.** The Subgroup will meet Hamish Trench and also MSPs.

The Landscape Alliance (wider than LINK) will be launched in April, to bring landscape as an issue higher up the agenda, and to make the connections between the landscape groups and the health and economy sectors. Charles reported that discussions with JMT had been progressing and they were expected to rejoin LINK.

Pete sensed that differentiation between regions is being talked about more. Vicki agreed, noting it fits with what we have been promoting. If farming and rural support are aligned with other funding pots, that is good.

Food and Farming Subgroup: Pete credited Anna with doing all the work. The subgroup have been talking much about the future of farming support. He thanked Daphne for facilitating involvement in the January [debate](http://www.scotlink.org/public-documents/link-parliamentary-briefing-on-future-rural-policy-and-support-in-scotland-debate/) on the future of rural policy and support in Scotland, which was good. Vicki and Pete had a positive meeting with Andrew Watson of SGovt, who talked of it being a process. He liked our 10 principles, was keen to read our submissions, etc. Still things are frozen till Brexit resolves or the Cabinet Secretary moves. On. Daphne noted we are pressing them on portfolio questions, and can use that as a lever. Vicki reported that another meeting there was acknowledgement by the Cab Sec that funding has to change, but that given the concerns of the cliff edge, he won’t press it with farmers. There is a wider concern that Govt is not able to deliver, that officials are inundated, and their planning is not real. MSPs are also picking up on this. We need to keep them moving forward, and the more work we can do for them, the better.

We have put in some PQs about the extra funding, the Barnett boost. We don’t know how the £55m has been spent, the priorities were not the same as for Westminster.

We are waiting to hear more about the new post Stability and Simplicity consultation task force. The is no clarity, or work programme.

There is some overlap with the Subgroup’s Good Food Nation Bill response, which Anna has drafted. The SNH project is out to tender, supported by LINK/RSPB funding. This will work out in more detail what the impact of funding mechanisms can be; at different ways to pay farmers for delivering public goods. It will include case studies. It won’t pursue any particular models. It will definitely be helpful.

The Subgroup met the previous day about next steps. There was general **support for doing more on agroecology**. The Greens will bring some amendments to the Climate Bill. The Subgroup wants to be more agenda setting, so is looking at doing more, potentially a report or campaign on agroecology. There was discussion of cross party groups. These come and go, and can be one off meetings. They are not necessarily the best route of getting to MSPs. There is one on food. Pete is keen to build a constituency of interest. Charles suggested building on the Food group. They require a secretariat, which is normally provided by the key interest. Daphne suggested **testing the waters with an event.**

Wildlife Subgroup: There have been various meetings with SNH at senior level to talk about biodiversity, and another meeting is scheduled. LINK is seeking representation on various groups in the biodiversity strategy structure. We are offered a place on the Strategy coordination group, the middle place. The EELS group is a closed shop of internal government reps. We have a place on the steering group of SNH’s biodiversity stakeholder conference in June, this year taken by Deborah.

We are engaging Species Champions more. The report [Scotland’s Nature on Red Alert](http://www.scotlink.org/public-documents/14428/) was published in January to influence the Climate Change Bill. We have been talking to various MSPs about how they can support that work, and they are keen, which is good.

ECCLR future work programme. We have written today to say they should be doing something more robust for 2020 and the new decade. Two key strands are on protected areas, one which Isobel and Stuart Brooks are taking forward. There are issues to do with site condition monitoring. Cycle support will end in March, so SNH has stopped doing it now until 2020. It is unclear what the next monitoring programme will include. There has been no transparency about the process. We are pressing for a meeting and to be involved at an early stage. There are impacts on other issues, including data for the future if no site condition monitoring going ahead. This has caused huge problems for the Coul Links case. We managed to get the Indicator retained in the National Performance Framework, but without monitoring it is an empty indicator. Its also an issue for farming support. Isobel drafted a letter to go to SNH, which Paul Walton will bring to Wildlife Subgroup for decision. This is a real weakening, and SNH and Govt cannot fulfil their legal obligations. Conservatives are interested in evidence. Daphne suggested we could **ask Maurice Golden to host a meeting.** There must be a halfway house between these extremes. JNCC has been doing a review of the guidelines, for quite a long time.

On the National Ecological Network, we await the report of the workshop convened by Zoe Clelland, expected by 25 April. An event with Claudia Beamish is confirmed for 25 June. We are making sure MSPs are following what a NEN means. We will invite Ecolife network presentation and presentations on landscape scale work of members.

The subgroup is trying to get post 2020 discussion going on biodiversity targets. Not much known, and one of the reasons for meeting SNH CEO.

SBIF will meet the ECCLR convenor 1 May. Daphne has passed on the Conservatives’ interest in evidence to the coordinator, Rachel Tierney, who is coming to the Subgroup meeting on 26 March, and the LINK Parliamentary reception on 5 June.

A letter to the First Minister on [Ramsar sites policy](http://www.scotlink.org/public-documents/letter-to-first-minister-re-scottish-government-ramsar-sites-policy/) was sent in March, followed up by a Ferret investigation. A spokesperson has said Govt will be in touch with us.

Paul Walton is now depute for Wildlife Subgroup.

Hilltracks: The annexes to the report have not been published yet. Timing is tied to the Planning Bill. Andy Wightman will put forward his amendment again at Stage 3, now expected in May or June. The Greens have their own campaign on it, and are liaising with Ramblers. They had a useful meeting with CNPA (Xander McDade convenor, Grant Moir, CEO and Eleanor Macintosh head of the Planning Cttee) the previous week. This included discussion of a recent ATV track, which had robust discussion at it planning meeting. Subgroup has recommended a code of practice for ATVs and suggested an exemplar. This will be raised with CNPA’s Upland advisory group, on which George Allan (NEMT) has contacts. Meantime Beryl is still monitoring, getting new cased in weekly on Cairngorms, Moray, Angus, Highland and P&K, and also recording hydro schemes.

Deer (Report from Alan McDonnel). Awaiting the Deer Working Group's report to government to land with the Cab Sec and hopefully be published soon after. We'll be asking SNH and Govt contacts what the route to publishing the report might be, hopefully it won't involve time in the long grass. They took SNH Board member Angus Campbell out to Shiehallion. He leads on deer issues for SNH Board, and met previously with ADMG. He gave nothing away, but he certainly heard our take on the issues.

Wildlife Crime ECCLR had its session on wildlife crime, and will write to the Cab Sec about the issue we raised. A meeting is being arranged with some Species Champions to see if there is additional action they can take. Liz Ferrell is now depute for this work area.

Woodlands. Major work has been on responding to the forestry strategy consulted on late last year and published a few weeks ago which involved those present, all disappointed at its blandness and lack of content. In terms of what was published, it is only very marginally better; still says nothing. The key element is that targets and monitoring have been removed from the original draft, and will have a standard monitoring and implementation framework over the next 12 months. That is how they will make the strategy a reality. They are setting up a stakeholder group, whose first task if to get the implementation strategy up and running. Charles is finding out who is driving it forward. We expect there will be at least one place offered to LINK. **This meeting agreed that 2 or 3 places should be allocated, as there will be equivalents from the commercial sector**. Woodlands are reaching out to the Forest Policy Group, to go through the strategy, talk through the implementation strategy and what all want to see in that. Also still waiting to see what new structures will look like; expect staff to be able to move from the current organisations, with similar pay bands, and reporting to Parliament. Both new bodies will have work plans that will be consulted upon - how land management and regulatory side will work. They will be working on in next 6 months, as well as engaging with implementation framework and the stakeholder group.

Funding? Charles said that Jo O Hara’s position is that forestry grants are different from agriculture grants, and foresees protectionism around forestry elements. Agroforestry are seen as part of the greening mechanisms. He would like to see this opened up, though FC will not be allies. Their view is that the public benefit aspect is covered. It was agreed some **more join up is needed from LINK on post CAP agriculture money and forestry grants**. Woodland has 4 active members of which 3 are actively engaged with the Food and Farming Subgroup. We should be able to include a woodland element to F&F discussions and ensure the LINK principles developed there are brought into Forestry discussions. **Woodlands will meet to discuss.**

Local authority level forestry and woodland strategies are still being done. Andy Wightman has an amendment in the Planning Bill to make them statutory. Vicki noted that the more we go forward **having separate regional strategies is not helpful,** in the LUS context.

**3. Priorities for 19/20.**

**Actions for all convenors are to report on the work carried out from October to March, and to update the future plans**. This meeting has flagged up some integration needs. Other relevant areas included:

LINK Environment campaign, act and strategy. The workshop on 10 April is to hone in specific policy asks of the Strategy and the Act. A colleague from ClientEarth will join to update on the UK Bill. Daphne would like to have insight in your specific policy area and what could be embedded in the Act; such as the NEN, better protected areas, the LUS, these are all in mind, and if we had the chance to draft our dream environment strategy, what would we do. **Look out for an email to come from Dapnne shortly**.

Kate Thomson McDermott was leading work for Govt on the Environment Strategy, and Daphne will contact her after our workshop. When they last talked about timelines, they accept the August draft was very draft, and are thinking of Spring next year for the Environment strategy. That suits our timing, we were looking at start of 2020 for legislation.

On Climate, the next stage of the Climate Bill will be in April. We have had some of our issues taken up. Dilraj has asked people who inputted previously to be the reference group for what our specific priorities will be. We will be working closely with SCCS. S**ome of the papers will be signed off through the Land Group.**

Pete flagged efforts to get a collective inquiry set up with NFUS to get agreement on the roadmap for Scottish food and farming on climate grounds. An event is planned to get farmers engaged in the issues.

**4. Convenership**, all are very happy for Vicki to continue. There is a huge amount of ongoing activity and the job is to ensure overview and join up.

**5. AOB**

Diarmid flagged a [consultation on rural land management](https://www.crownestatescotland.com/media-and-notices/news-media-releases-opinion/businesses-and-communities-asked-how-rural-land-can-be-managed-to-benefit-all) out from The Crown Estate.

Fox hunting ban is coming, to ban trail hunting, taking the English model further.

**6. Next meeting 19 September** at 1.30 pm, following a meeting of the Land Use Subgroup. The LINK office is booked for both meetings.