



Scottish  
Environment  
LINK

**Annual Report Summary**

**April 2021 to March 2022**



## A message from LINK's Chair, Charles Dundas

2021 into 2022 was another challenging year. Covid-19 continued to impact the work of LINK and our members, alongside other external events including Brexit and latterly the Russian invasion on Ukraine. All brought high levels of uncertainty.

This impact on LINK, our members and across the third sector has manifested through highly mobile staff teams as people moved through and beyond the sector, reassessing their own priorities and looking for new opportunities. This brought new ideas and approaches to the work of the network but it also meant we lost organisational memory and experience. The resilience and ongoing support of new and continuing staff, members and supporters have meant that as a network, we've been able to build on the opportunities for the environment in terms of its protection and restoration for future generations.

Those opportunities included, in November, COP26, which brought the global focus on climate negotiations where nature and nature based solutions played a visible and important role. The Holyrood election in May brought new focus and energy for the environment in Scotland with the Bute House agreement between SNP and Green Party to work together.

LINK was able to meet the year's challenges and make the most of the opportunities thanks to our dedicated staff team and our members. Particular thanks to those who remained committed to LINK and our joint work and to the new staff and members who came on board during the year bringing new energy and ideas.



## A message from LINK's Chief Officer, Deborah Long

Now is the time of positive energy and commitments brought to the centre of the new Government by the Green Party with ambitions in the new Programme for Government: this is a major step and the challenge is now in delivery.

Now is the time to build on the momentum of the international global climate conference, COP26, and the global biodiversity conference, COP15. Both bring opportunities to agree and then deliver ambitious, legal nature restoration targets in Scotland and in step with the rest of the world. LINK has inputted ideas, inspiration and public support for nature restoration targets through our Fight for Scotland's Nature Campaign and our ongoing advocacy work. And LINK has been working with partners looking at what finance is needed and how we can work with partners to inspire public, private and charitable investment into effective nature restoration action.

LINK brings together our members to make the most of all opportunities. We will work with partner organisations from across the third sector, government, business and Europe to gather evidence on the impacts of work that restores nature, connects people to nature and the environment and restores a healthy fully ecologically functioning environment. We will demonstrate best practice and gather and offer insights and inspiration for effective action.

There is of course much more to do. But the momentum here in Scotland, across the world and amongst younger generations, means that now is the time.



1 July 2022

## The Year in Summary: Strategic Theme 1 - A Sustainable Scotland

This year, the political landscape in which we operate brought new opportunities for LINK and our members to bring the environment to the heart of government. From April 2021 to October 2021, there was a Holyrood election, the establishment of the sixth Scottish Parliament, appointment of a new cabinet and ministerial team and a new power-sharing agreement between the SNP and Scottish Greens. The SNP and Greens formally sharing power in government and the addition of two Green ministers is a significant and valuable change in political dynamics at Holyrood.

In April we published our second [Rhetoric to Reality: revisited](#) report. This report focuses minds on turning political ambition into delivered reality.

With the election imminent, we shared priorities from LINK's manifesto on social media in the weeks leading up to the election. For members and supporters, we published an [analysis of the commitments in party manifestoes](#). In May, with the new government in place, LINK provided a series of [11 introductory briefings](#) for MSPs on issues concerning the environment and society to bring new MSPs up to speed on key environmental issues.

In August, the **Economics Group** worked with the Wellbeing Economy Alliance to [raise concerns](#) with Kate Forbes, Cabinet Secretary for Finance and Economy, about the lack of environmental expertise on her advisory council. The Group [published a statement](#) calling for greater ambition in the government's strategy.

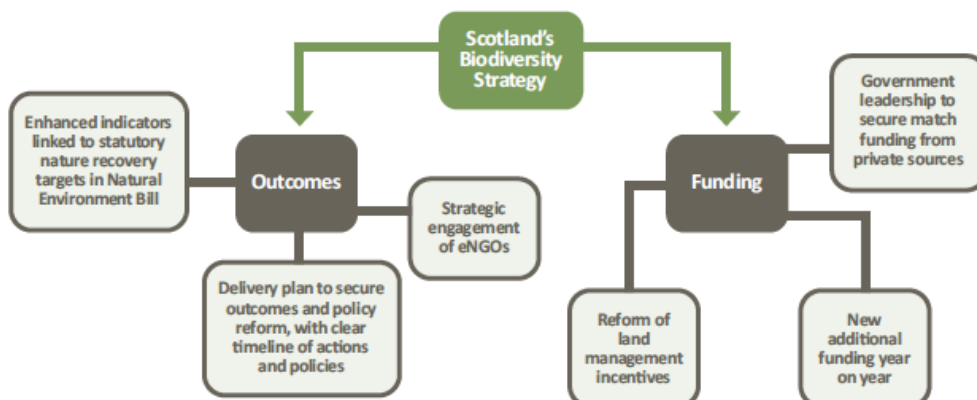
LINK's **Food and Farming Group** remains concerned that the new Government Advisory Group on Agriculture, ARIOB, focuses on small issues of concern rather than discussing fundamentals around what public investment should be spent and the outcomes it should achieve. This is one reason behind the development of LINK's new campaign, Farming for Scotland's Future. It builds public awareness and support for changes in the rural support system, to enable farmers to farm for nature, climate and communities.

LINK's **Marine Group's** [Ocean Recovery Plan](#), published in December 2020, continues to guide our work on marine planning, protection and fisheries. It was promoted ahead of the 2021 Holyrood elections, when meeting with political parties and their manifesto writing teams. We were pleased to see the Programme for Government include commitment to 10% of Scotland's seas being highly protected.

The National Planning Framework 4 (NPF4) continues to be the top advocacy priority for the **Planning Group**, because it sets the policies for the next decade in Scotland's planning system. The draft encompassed several areas of interest to LINK members from Nature Networks to protection of greenbelts, ancient woodland and peatlands. Planning Group members contributed a series of LINK Thinks blogs to highlight the shortcomings of the draft NPF4 (see [here](#) for example).

Members of the **Wildlife** and **Marine** Groups have provided [comment](#) to officials on the draft Scottish Biodiversity Strategy, highlighting the ecosystems that must be represented in the Strategy and action plan and provided [comment](#) on the outcomes and measures of success.

The necessary components of a successful biodiversity strategy



Source: based on Key elements for success 2021

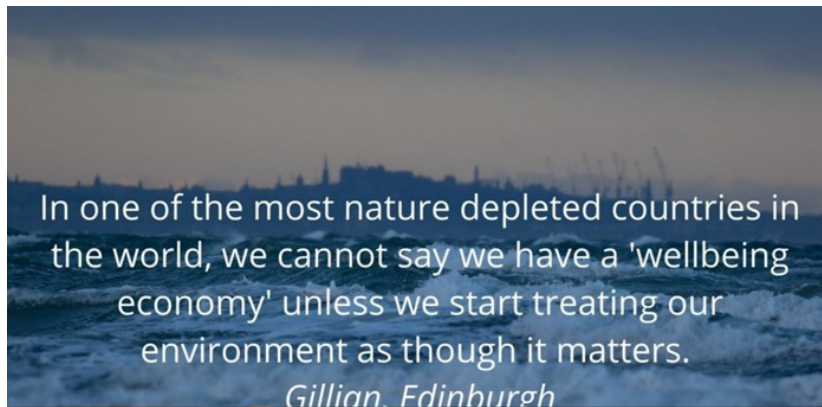
Regular engagement with officials on the development of the Strategy, due for consultation in May and publication in autumn 2022 continued, with the hope of a strong strategy, capable of meeting the new expected nature targets.

## The Year in Summary: Strategic Theme 2 - Strong Voice

In a year where we started in lockdown and ended with the beginnings of hybrid working practices both at LINK and in member bodies, online meetings and outputs remained the norm. We published a total of 6 reports, 21 briefings, 15 consultation responses and 5 written evidence to Parliamentary Committees, supplemented by oral evidence. We took part in a wide range of external stakeholder groups; the member representatives and staff acting on behalf of the sector. We wrote to Ministers, publishing four of these letters on our website. We also published 10 press releases, 49 blogs and commissioned 9 films.

LINK's [Fight For Scotland's Nature](#) campaign achieved significant success during this period. In December 2020, the Continuity Act established Environmental Standards Scotland, the new environmental watchdog for Scotland following Brexit and embedded environmental principles into Scots Law. The Programme for Government and the Bute House Agreement both committed the new Scottish

Government to adopt a policy to create nature recovery targets.



We collected messages to ministers Mairi McAllan and Lorna Slater from over 1,200 supporters setting out why Scotland's nature matters to them.

**Nature Champions:** in June 2021 we relaunched our very successful Species Champion initiative as Nature Champions. This newly expanded **Nature Champions** initiative, which now allows MSPs to champion a priority habitat as well as species, enabled more LINK members to be involved in the initiative as host organisations for the first time.

By April 2022, we had 58 MSPs signed up as Champions, with site visits with MSPs, Parliamentary Motions lodged by MSP Nature Champions and a wide range of engagement activities and social media activity.



**COP26** took place in Glasgow in early November, with many MSPs and LINK members attending events across the two-week period. LINK promoted events being run by member organisations, including the public march on 6 November. LINK coordinated and produced the COP26 LINK Thinks series, available [here](#).

LINK's work to assess sector needs on **equality, diversity and inclusion** included a member survey in April 2021, to serve as a baseline. Supported by the National Heritage Lottery Fund, our new Nature for All project, brings capacity into LINK to provide the support that our survey indicated members are looking for.

The [Sea Scotland conference](#) took place in June. Over 100 people attended the online conference, which focused on the relationship between communities and the oceans and reflected on the strategies and actions needed to tackle the intertwined nature and climate emergencies.

Over the year we published 49 blogs written by staff, members and guests, on the LINK, Fight for Scotland's Nature and Save Scottish Seas websites. These are all shared via social media channels [Instagram](#) [twitter](#) [facebook](#) and [You tube](#).

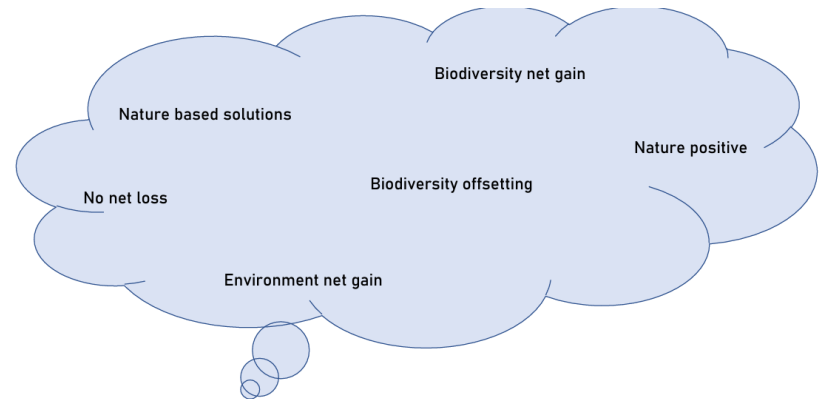


## Year in summary: Strategic Theme 3 - Effective Network

In common with many organisations as we emerge from the covid-19 pandemic, there has been a lot of change in the staff team at LINK over this period. This has been the longer term impact of covid-19 and is not unique to LINK, or indeed the third sector. With that level of change in what was already a fast moving and dynamic external environment, highly dependent on effective communications and management systems, pressures on staff have been significant. Managing the strains of this has taken up significant time for the CO and has required fortitude and good humour from the entire team. That is what has enabled the staff team to continue to deliver an efficient service to the network.

Spring and autumn networking both took place online and embraced new technology to build greater efficiencies and interactive online working tools. This helped maintain coherence and supported progress reporting.

In addition to the regular group meetings, LINK held a number of workshops with members, including a workshop on fiscal levers, and a multi group workshop on Biodiversity Net Gain.

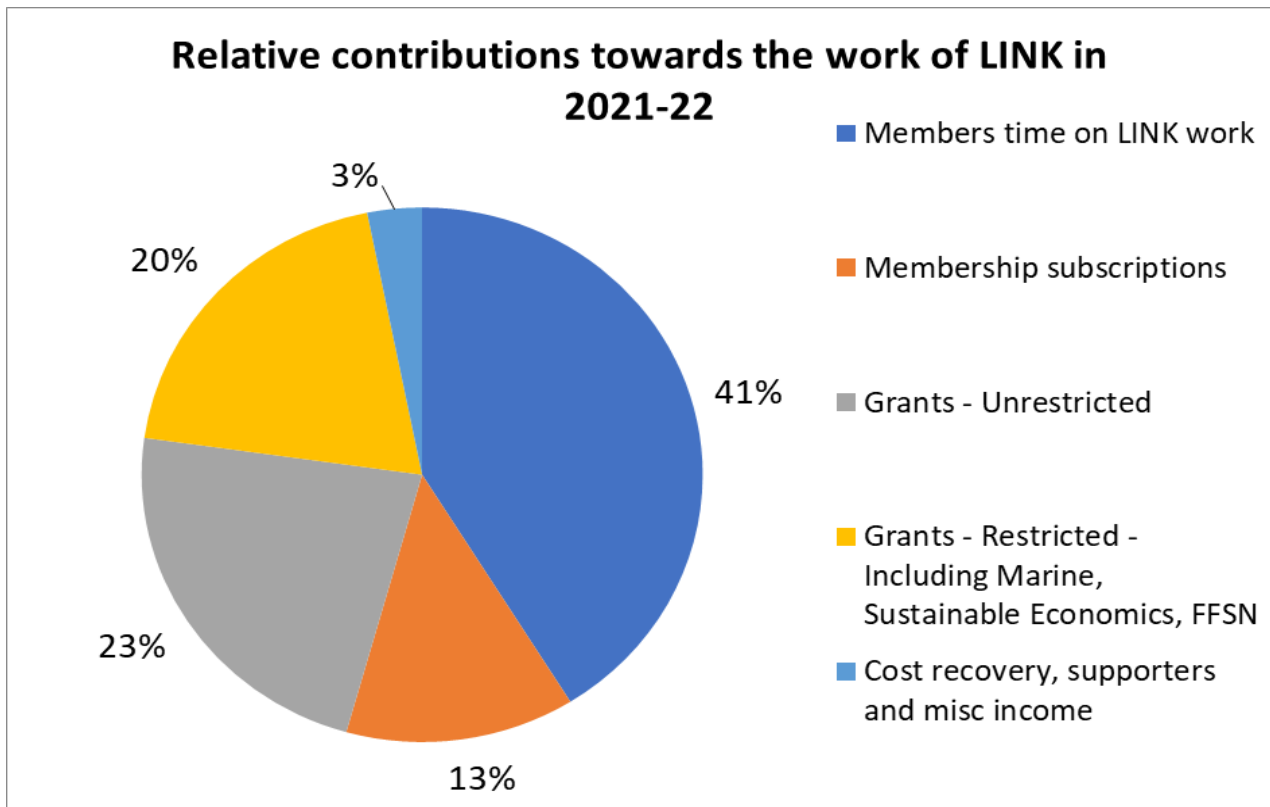


There was excellent progress with development of the **Environmental Rights Centre for Scotland**, which we have incubated from its beginnings in January 2019. ERCS registered with OSCR as a new Scottish Charitable Incorporated Organisation, and became fully independent of LINK in July 2021.

### LINK in numbers



## Finances in summary



LINK's full annual account and reports are available on our website [here](#).

## Looking Ahead

Working with others is how LINK works. This Decade of Ecosystem Restoration, declared by the UN, is when LINK is committed to stepping up our partnership working, with our members and supporters, and building stronger links with others who are also committed to connecting, restoring and making Scotland's environment resilient to change.

We will continue to work closely with our members, to support them so we are all stronger and to be inclusive for everyone who wants to become a champion for the environment. For parliamentarians, this means rolling out our new Nature Champions initiative. And with other policy makers and stakeholders, we will continue to offer advice and inspiration and build much wider confidence to protect and restore Scotland's environment through effective legislation and policy.

Our work to inspire and enable the public to get involved in policy change too will continue and intensify. Building public awareness and support for the need to act for Scotland's environment is fundamental to creating the political space for effective and ambitious action. Our campaigns around farming, ocean recovery, a circular economy and nature targets are central to this.

As we move forward, we and our members, are acutely aware that we need to build everyone's voice for the environment. To do that, we need to be more equal, diverse and inclusive. Our new Nature for All project will help us increase our network's knowledge and confidence and help us do that.

We aim to give the environment more of a voice, in a much wider range of fora than we could reach alone. We will inspire, build momentum and work together to deliver the level of transformational change this decade needs to see, so that:

**Scotland's environment is connected | restored | resilient |  
Our society and well being have nature at their heart, benefiting people, communities  
and the planet**

## Thanks to LINK members



## Thanks to LINK Funders

All of our work is underpinned by member and supporter subscriptions, additional financial contributions and voluntary time from members, supporters and honorary officers, which together account for 54% of total contributions. We are very grateful to all LINK's core and project funders over the period, including member bodies, Trees for Life, National Trust for Scotland, Woodland Trust, Scottish Wildlife Trust, RSPB Scotland, WWF Scotland and Scottish Council for National Parks

Esmée Fairbairn Foundation, William Grant Foundation, Craignish Trust, Friends Provident Foundation, NatureScot, Scottish Government, Tay Charitable Trust, John Ellerman Foundation, Marine Protected Areas Fighting Fund, National Lottery Heritage Fund



## Thanks to LINK's Organisational supporters



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