

# LINK Networking Meeting

25 June 2024: 13.00 - 14.50



Via zoom

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Welcome to the day from LINK Chair: Charles Dundas.

Introduction to the context for today's networking: see slides in Appendix 1

### Wider context

Deborah outlined today's working context at national UK and international levels with three key challenges:

**The collapse of the Bute House Agreement:** some of our key policy asks were in there – some delivered / on their way; others not yet started. SNP tribulations means Scottish Government

is distracted; excellent Cab Sec now on mat leave: summer recess is when final year of current parliament's Programme for Government will be agreed – this is the last chance.

**Disinformation and deceit:** This is a growing issue for us all: countering disinformation with facts doesn't work – it just wastes time and energy. We need to get on the front foot and offer the alternative vision of hope: see our new campaign update below. October's Congress will tackle this issue.

**Time squeeze:** next Holyrood election is in May 2026: with just under 24 months, this is not very long to get everything through Parliament that we, and others, would like to see. SG may be tempted to do the easy things and focus on those and perceived vote winners. We need to make sure the environment is seen as a vote winner, which by and large it is. It's instructive to look at the recent EU election: while far right made gains in France, Italy and Germany (which is what we're hearing about), elsewhere, notably Nordics and Hungary, they lost ground (hearing less about). There is a useful EEB blog on it [here](#).

Tackling today's opportunities and challenges means we are looking to build wider support for environmental policies: build stronger partnerships; engage strategically with stakeholders and use cross cutting issues beyond the sector to build support. These include our input on the Just Transition; wellbeing economy; land reform and spatial protection on land and at sea and nature finance for example.

We are tackling these through the Group Work Plans but also through programmes across LINK, like the campaigns, the theme of adaptation and resilience including connectivity, funding and finance, and Nature Champions.

### [LINK's Strategic Plan 2024 - 2030](#)

Deborah gave a reminder summary of how we have developed, together, our new Strategic Plan over the last 18 months. This has involved LINK Board, members and the staff team. Key elements of it are included in the slide pdf (below) and a draft of the full document is available [here](#) for members. This and an A3 summary will be available publicly soon.

### [Advocacy update, current challenges and opportunities](#)

Dan outlined what's happening in Parliament now and the opportunities we have coming up over the next 6 months. He reminded us of the successes we've recently seen through our work on the Circular Economy Bill, The Wildlife Management (Grouse) Bill, the Scottish Biodiversity Strategy, National Planning Framework 4 and the Agriculture and Rural Communities Bill. Looking forward to the next 2024 – 2025 Parliamentary year, Dan outlined some key foci for LINK Groups. These include the Natural Environment Bill, a Water Bill, the Land Reform Bill, 30x30, National parks and Marine reform. Plans we have for these include the new Scotland Loves Nature campaign (update below), backed up some new polling research, commissioned by LINK and RSPB Scotland.

Intergovernmental issues we are keeping an eye on include the General Election, Retained EU Law Act, the Internal Market Act and the UK constitution.

## LINK campaign update

Miriam gave an update on LINK's current and new campaigns:

### Farm for Scotland's Future

We've been running the Farm for Scotland's Future campaign for the past two years, with backing from 29 LINK member organisations, and 12 external organisations including farmers' groups. Over that time, we've published a report, got a fair bit of media coverage, made short films with farmers and crofters, and held two supporter webinars. More than two and a half thousand people signed our petition, and many of them wrote powerful messages about why the future of Scottish farming matters to them. Through our most recent e-action, more than 800 people sent more than 7,000 messages to their MSPs about the Agriculture and Rural Communities Bill.

The bill itself, which was voted through last week, doesn't do all that much to set out how the Scottish government will achieve its vision for sustainable agriculture. But we did achieve a few wins within the bill, including a mechanism to set targets for reducing the environmental impact of farming, monitoring and evaluation being built into the new system, and also more detail on what will be required in the Rural Support Plan.

Importantly we managed to increase the prominence of farming as an environmental issue, with a steady churn of media coverage – including in the coverage of the Scottish government's climbdown on climate targets. That association of farming with climate and nature is something we can call a success, and something that can be built upon.

Farm for Scotland's Future is winding down now that the bill has passed, so that we can focus our resources on our new Scotland Loves Nature campaign. But a lot of the important policy detail will be in the secondary legislation that follows the bill, and the Food and Farming Group will continue to advocate for farming policy that works for nature, climate and people. The campaign website will stay open while the secondary legislation is developed, and we can add farming related content generated by LINK members.

There's a meeting in the calendar for 22 August to look back at this campaign and reflect on what we achieved and what we might have done better. If you haven't received details of that and would like to come, let Miriam know.

### Save Scottish Seas

The Save Scottish Seas campaign is currently focused on our existing network of marine protected areas, and in February we launched a petition calling for the long-awaited fisheries restrictions to be put in place. The report we commissioned from James Harrison at Edinburgh Uni on MPAs was published, and thanks to Morag we got a really good article in the Guardian.

Our plan had been for the campaign to make some noise around, and generate public responses to, the two MPA consultations that were expected this year. We'd been told the

first of these would be published in the spring, but it is yet to appear. So, we're working out how we might be able to increase the pressure and be more critical of the government on this issue, as we've had these largely ineffective MPAs for 10 years now, and the management measures were originally due to be put in place by 2016. So, after the summer we're hoping to do more on this.

### Scotland Loves Nature

The new Scotland Loves Nature campaign will launch on 17 July. This campaign will call on the Scottish government to do these three things:

- Urgently introduce a Natural Environment Bill with legally binding nature recovery targets
- Put funding in place to restore nature
- Help communities to protect and restore their local environment

This campaign is really a follow-on from the Fight for Scotland's Nature campaign, which we ran from 2018 to 2021. Nature recovery targets were one of the demands of that campaign, and in 2021 the Scottish government committed to setting targets within a Natural Environment Bill to be introduced in the 2023-4 parliamentary session. So that deadline has been missed, and the revision to the climate targets and the resulting political fallout make commitment to such targets less secure.

We want legally binding nature recovery targets before the next Holyrood elections, and for that to happen the bill has to be introduced within the next year.

So, our immediate aim will be to put pressure on the Scottish government to include a Natural Environment Bill in this year's Programme for Government, which will be announced in early September. Clearly that's a short timeframe, which is why we're putting this campaign together very quickly.

We'll be relying on members to help us. We'll have an e-action asking people to write to their MSPs, and it would be great if members can send that out to supporters over the summer.

Getting the bill in the Programme for Government would just be the first step, and ideally we want the campaign to cover the whole period of the passage of the bill.

So, we want this campaign to run for two years, taking us to the next Scottish election. But at the moment we only have enough money to run a basic level 6-month campaign. A number of members are contributing funding, for which we're very grateful, and we're also looking for other sources. Any help on that would be very welcome.

Aside from funding, we also need as many organisations as possible to put their names to the campaign. Members don't need to make a financial contribution in order to do this. So far, 29 LINK member organisations have joined. But we have 45 members, so it would be good to have more support. If you haven't already signed up, or if you're not sure whether you have,

just send [Miriam](#) an email. We're also asking lots of external organisations and community groups to put their names to the campaign.

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### Member updates:

Key member plans for everyone to be aware of e.g. planned research, events, campaigns, reports.

#### WWF Scotland (Arina):

priorities in next month include an ongoing strategy refresh. Agriculture and farming remain a priority and Just Transition/skills. Looking at securing skills funding and investment in farming in the Agriculture Bill. Working with SCCS on new carbon budget mechanisms and new climate infrastructure and Heat in Buildings strategy. Election campaigning will be focus of key public campaigning. Ramping up nature restoration work. Policy informed better by voices on ground. Working with Just Transition Commissioner on that too.

#### Scottish Wildlife Trust (Hazel):

inputted into the Nature Scot report on Scotland planning system; consultation on Land Reform; engaging in 30x30 working group; responded to national climate change adaptation consultation and various other LINK responses. Joint NGO response on sandeel fishing too. Species work focuses on nature-based solutions, deer management is a SWT priority. Funding confirmed for deer management project thermal dome survey of Assynt and Coigach. Scottish Wildlife Trust 60<sup>th</sup> anniversary this year and launching story telling campaign around that.

#### Borders Forest Trust (Charles):

Nature Restoration going on; recruiting for first ecologist so now 12 people; physical landscape working and educational and community work also crucial. Fundraising is still a big issue for them.

#### Trees for Life (Alan):

Just written strategy under different themes; woodland creation through natural restoration. Deer in highlands and modelling. Beavers. Nature Connection and recovery at scale working with Highland land managers on that. Nature Networks looking at Caledonian pinewoods. Rewilding centre second year looking ways to provide experiences about what rewilding looking like in practice. Working with communities. Looking at what Scottish Land Commissioner and SG up to.

#### CIEEM (Annie):

CIEEM annual awards on Friday. Nature Champions shortlisted for eNGO award (finalist); integrated trees projects, Beavers introduction to National Cairngorms Park. Policy wise general election review of manifestos. Series of events linked to conference on Nature Restoration. Green jobs for Nature. LINK working group on Green Jobs.

#### Soil Association (David):

policy work launched report at Royal Highland Show with Woodland Trust. Whole farm planning report as well. Third report around agricultural reform and reducing emissions. On

farming side multiple applications for funding rounds an Agri-ecology. New organic action plan by steering group to be completed in October in time for budget setting in December. Food pilot expansion end on food for life model which will benefit whole range of groups including NHS and prisons etc. Part of Edinburgh Uni team looking at how public procurement feeds into food plans. Natural capital work.

#### RSPB (Esme):

Natural Environment Bill; working with UK colleagues on general election work and work around 2026 Scottish elections too. Seabird conservation report coming out. Biodiversity enhancement and implement of the National Planning Framework. Going through a lot of changes and savings organisationally; moving out of Edinburgh office.

#### Froglife (Kathy):

organised online conference for 16 October. Finished five years of wildlife monitoring in tunnels at a Gartcosh nature reserve. Developed next large scale project in Scotland: Ayrshire, Lanarkshire and Lothians creating wildlife corridor through these regions. Green pathways scheme for disadvantaged young people and dementia sufferers. Research on ponds being published. Trying to encourage Nature Champions to visit sites. Retained member of staff as science manager so now three staff. Supported WCL in promoting demonstration on Saturday. Number of different groups health groups and others, supporting that good to see. Mainstream press decided to ignore it.

#### HWD (Alison):

Whales and dolphins focus on MPA's and consultation being delayed. Focused on minke whales published catalogue of them last year showed highest level of site fidelity in Europe. Will continue to look at hot spots of them. Public document to encourage stakeholders to see how these animals are using the waters. Research over 30 years being published. Indirect monitoring of MPA areas too.

#### FoES (Matthew):

staff changes looking for FoES Director; work on climate; climate target changes; opposing new oil and gas in UK waters using for general elections; Peterhead power station taking argument to Peterhead. Circular Economy Bill amendments; Just Transitions work being stalled; Economy work with Wellbeing Economy Alliance initially to frame input to refresh the National Strategy on Economic Transformation. Benefits of working in partnership. Want to talk to you all about de-growth and best way of approaching it.

#### Butterfly Conservation (Kieren):

Pip Gray now employed and they also have a youth board. Campaigns coming up on trees and woods - one in October. Woodland management right tree right place right purpose. Bit more England centric. Biodiversity net gain and associated woodland management and also the biodiversity metric in Scotland. Light pollution campaign at end year. To get involved (as Buglife in Wales have) please get in touch. Pesticides work helping with report by the Centre of Ecology and Hydrology on using genomics to predict butterfly and moth effects by pesticides. Air pollutions and grasslands campaign as well.

### Ramblers (Gavin):

getting people outside to be in open green space; 3 million walked for recreation in last month, biggest form of physical activity in Scotland by far. Extent to which institutional arrangements need updated and resourced. Reflecting fact 20 years since landmark access regulations, need less legislation around simply walking; trying to engage immigrants and lower income families to get engaged with (and the benefits of) walking.

### JMT (Thomas):

ongoing estates that manage are a priority and also working with Alliance for Scotland's Rainforests; by end 2025 PfG focused on deer, progressing commitments to implement the deer working group recommendations and Scottish land tax campaign. New work focusing more strongly on campaigns rather than focusing on more policy. Exception is work on Nature Markets. JMT awards launching in 2025 with a focus on partnership working.

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### Summary of the day:

With the current advocacy theatre undergoing rapid change, our focus remains on achieving the short term (to 2026) policy changes for the environment, as part of our journey towards meeting our strategic 2030 objectives and national targets on nature and climate. The ongoing flux at Holyrood and Westminster offers many opportunities as well as challenges, and the LINK team is here to help members and Groups make the most of the opportunities and address and minimise the challenges.

Our approach to do that is by building political space for real delivery: rhetoric to reality is still an issue. Over the next 2 years, the focus will be on embedding current SG policy commitments and beyond that to focus on delivery.

### Cross cutting themes:

**Climate adaptation and resilience:** we're looking at how to embed these themes across LINK work and how to lead on a direction of travel towards the nature and climate emergency. We will be asking Groups to reflect on this in work plan updates (see next steps). This theme is relevant to most Group Work plans and the staff team is pulling all the threads together now.

**Just Transition:** we're building on ongoing work within and outwith LINK on JT and making sure future generations have access to a healthy and diverse environment with resilient nature.

**Land reform and community agency:** LINK's Land Use group remains under capacity so we're looking at where this leadership sits around nature resilience, community engagement and landscape scale recovery. This includes engagement by members, eg JMT.

**Funding and finance:** advocacy around funding and finance sits in a few places within the LINK structure: within the staff team, as well as through SEFF, and the Nature Finance and Sustainable Economics Groups. We're supporting NRF and advocating on other funding mechanisms, including private as well as public and philanthropic funding. LINK's economic advocacy work is project funded and that funding runs out in September, which will have consequences on LINK's capacity. Biodiversity enhancement / net gain remains a gap in LINK but market is moving ahead without us, so we need to have another look at capacity there.

Economic strategy and de growth is an area that the Sustainable Economic group is interested in but has no current capacity to develop.

**Space for nature:** activity is largely delivered on the ground via members - e.g. Froglife, Trees for Life, HWDT and also member work on habitats – e.g. BC and Plantlife. LINK’s focus is on helping to build community connections and building alliance e.g. Common Ground and marine conversations.

**Tactics:**

**Being voice for the environment:** this is a key tactic for us to be the voice of the environment in other stakeholder fora: see page on website of complete range of where we try and do that [here](#). The Nature for All project to supporting us all as environmental organisations to become more inclusive, diverse and open to all to increase the voice of the environment. The project resource hub is [here](#).

**Measuring success:** we need to get better at measuring and celebrating our own successes as well as in Government. The Nature Champion initiative is a key celebration mechanism. 2025 will be final year of current iteration and we will be looking to relaunch for new Parliament cohort in 2026.

**Keeping Govt to account:** on their policy and legislation commitments as well as on delivery. We’re also now looking into what we want to see in the next parliament.

**Using comms and campaigns:** to build public support and thereby political space for effective action on land, both in rural and urban contexts, and at sea. This is happening at LINK and in members too, e.g. Butterfly Conservation, JMT, RSPB

**Office move:** LINK is closing our Edinburgh office in August when the lease runs out. We are working with a number of member organisations to look for shared space in Edinburgh. This new hub will, we hope, open in December 2025 and will we hope become a creative and innovative space.

**Capacity:** we are between us all doing a huge amount, and everyone is stretched thinly across an ever expanding and ever urgent To do list. The LINK team here are very sensitive to the need to prioritise and have a close eye on making sure we cut our cloth to our resources at LINK and in member bodies.

**Importance of alliance and partnerships:** we have too big a job for any of us alone or even us as network so we will continue to develop partnerships projects and relationships to cast the voice for the environment ever wider.

**Next steps:**

We didn’t have the number of reps sufficient to be able to run through the usual Group Work Plan assessment and update exercise. We’re using the feedback forms from this session to identify how you would prefer to complete this vital task.

If you haven’t already, please sign up to Scotland Loves Nature campaign, by emailing [Miriam](#).

Note: Rachael Fairbairn, Deborah Long

26 – 28 June 2024



Scottish Environment LINK the voice for Scotland’s environment

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**Tuesday 25 June 2024**

**LINK Work Planning: 1300 – 1445**

**The plan for today**

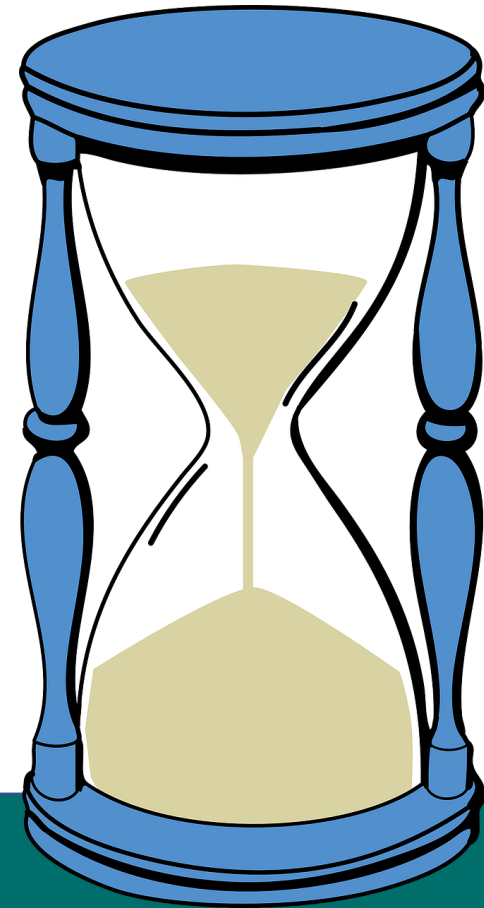
# Environmental policy today- the opportunities and challenges

Bute House falling down



Disinformation and deceit

Time squeeze



# LINK Strategic Plan thinking so far: Reaching 2030

## Networking July 2023

Key Policy priorities	Approach
Nature networks Nature friendly land management	Joined up planning Public goods & benefits tests
Just transition Well being economics	Environment embedded Future Generation voices heard Ecological boundaries used in monitoring & reporting
Effective marine protection	Effective spatial planning Community buy in
Public support and political space	

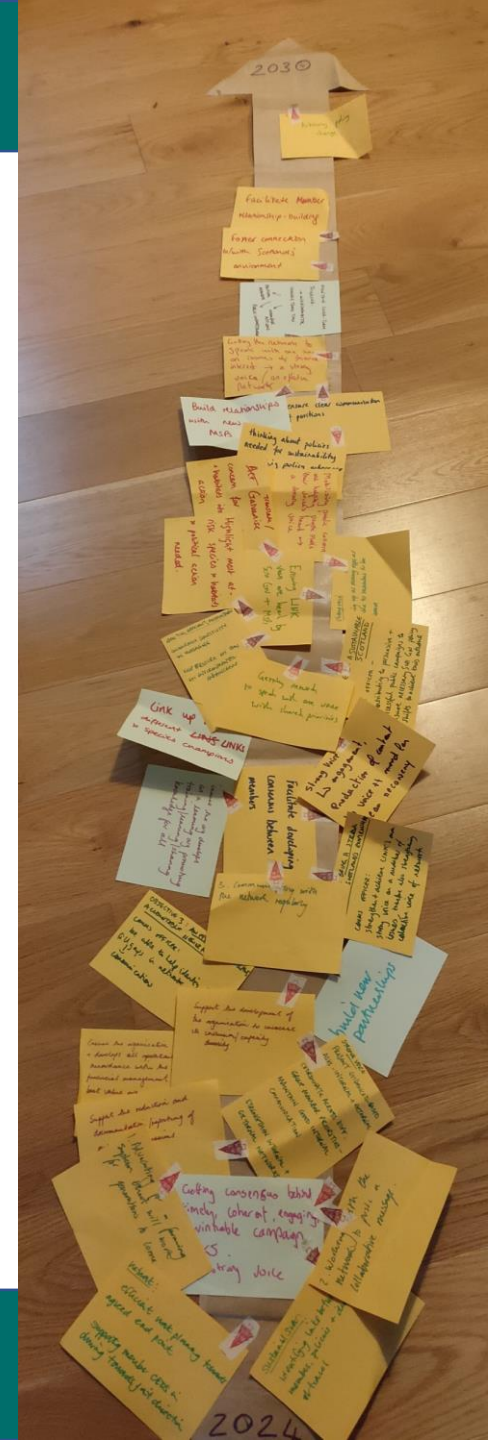
## Staff team away day September 2023

### Ways of working:

- Ruthless prioritising
- Sense of belonging
- Shared ownership
- Capacity building

### Cross network activities:

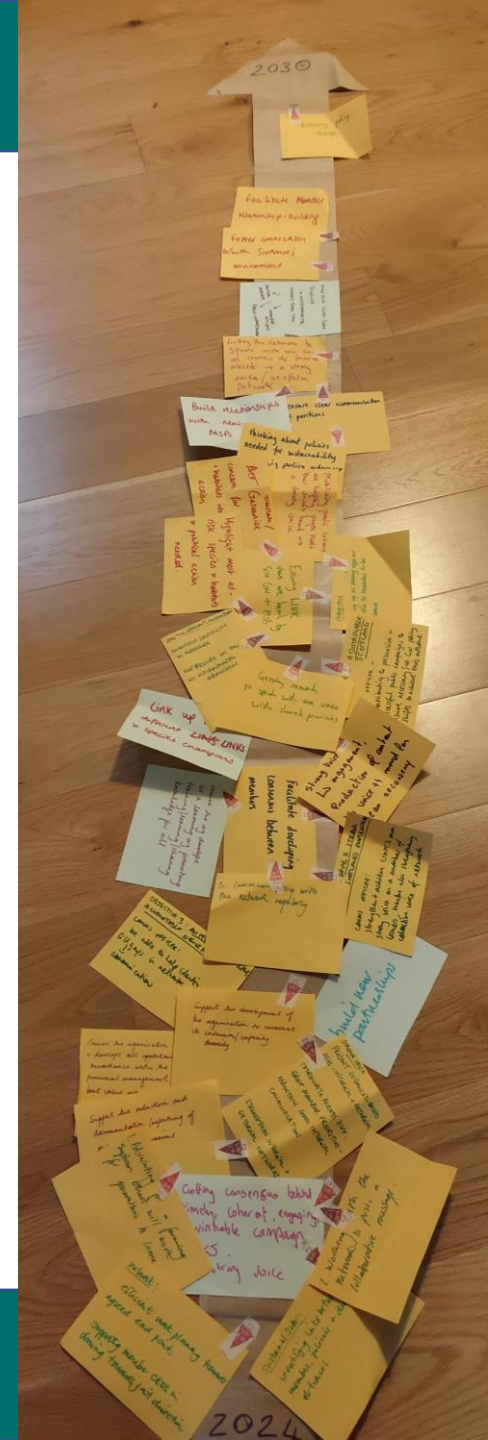
- Active campaigns
- Active relationship building
- New partnerships



# LINK Strategic Plan thinking so far: Reaching 2030

## Networking December 2023

Opportunities	Challenges
Elections create new commitments & accountability	Lack of political will to make necessary changes to environmental policy
Climate & nature decline ever more evident, adding strength to calls for change	Prioritisation of public funding = challenge; harnessing private funding = challenge
Amplifying good work at community level underpinning strong narrative & targeted comms	Countering misinformation & greenwashing takes resource
Public support and political space	



## Scotland's environment is Connected | Restored | Resilient |

Our society has nature at its heart, benefiting people, communities and the planet

### LINK's mission

LINK supports our members to work together on agreed priorities, in order to effect environmental policy change in Scotland. We build partnerships that create irresistible momentum towards change.

# LINK's objectives

## A sustainable Scotland

Where Scotland's nature, land and seascapes are healthy and resilient, supporting thriving communities and flourishing people.

## A strong voice

For the environment, nature, land and seascapes so they support a prosperous future.

## An effective network

Communicating effectively, working together and achieving more.

# Transformations required

1. A move from environmental policy that sounds good to environmental policy that does good.
2. Environmental leadership from the eNGO sector and government commitment to lead.
3. Land and sea use that is nature and climate friendly.
4. A circular economy with net zero emissions and no nature loss.
5. All major infrastructure projects, as part of National Planning Framework, delivering for biodiversity, climate and society, through environmental audits that together map cumulative impacts
6. A justice centred approach adopted to ensure a just transition to a climate and nature friendly world.

## How do we do this?

- Horizon scanning to inform changing environmental priorities.
- Ensuring the network is well informed about current political, economic and social contexts.
- Prioritising collective work and resources to have greater impact or influence.
- Developing actions around priorities through groups of members working together.
- Providing delegates to relevant national and international stakeholder forums who can represent the case for environmental sustainability.
- Holding events to raise awareness, encourage debate, make the case for change and influence direction on key issues.
- Designing and delivering campaigns and communications that act as a voice for the environment in Scotland



## Risk appetite:

There are many challenges ahead: nature is still not in a good state and is still not part of everyday life for too many people.

Today, the need for organisations to work together and with government and Parliamentarians to act effectively on the knowledge we have and the will society is showing is even more urgent than ever before.

Together, we must inspire action and create political will to live within our environmental boundaries to build a prosperous and resilient society.

**Prioritise**

**Work together**

**Focus on the long term aim**

**Bring people with us**

**Enable others to act**

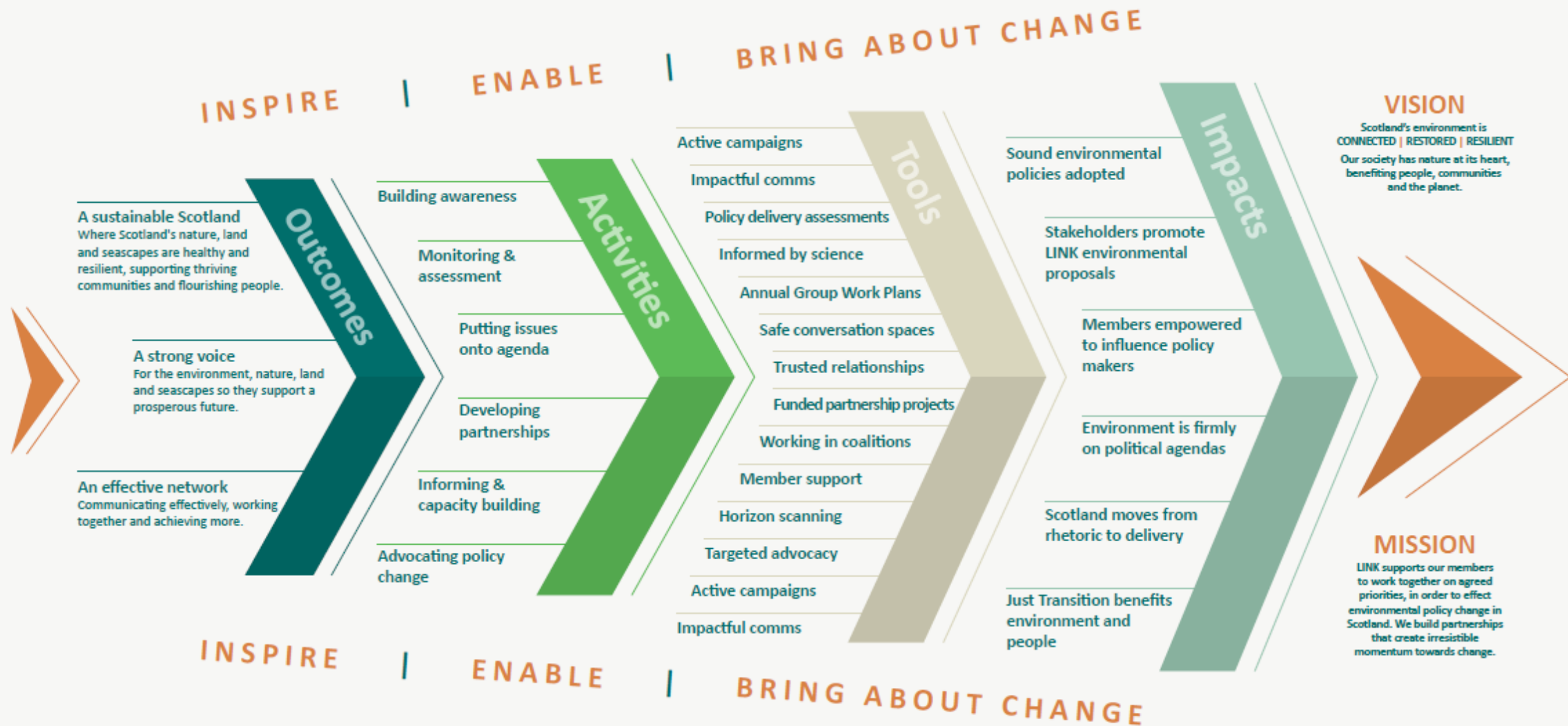


## MISSION

LINK supports our members to work together on agreed priorities, in order to effect environmental policy change in Scotland. We build partnerships that create irresistible momentum towards change.

- Outcomes
- Activities
- Impacts
- Tools





# Scottish Parliament priorities – 2024-25

## 2023-24 parliamentary year

Circular Economy Bill

Wildlife Management  
(Grouse) Bill

Scottish Biodiversity  
Strategy

NPF4

Agriculture Bill

## 2024-25 parliamentary year... and beyond...

Natural Environment  
Bill

Water Bill

Land Reform Bill

30x30

National Parks

Marine reform

## Intergovernmental issues

General election

Retained EU Law Act

Internal Market Act

The constitution

## Farm for Scotland's Future



### Farm for Scotland's Future

Make farming work for nature,  
climate and people

## Save Scottish Seas



## Scotland Loves Nature



Scottish  
Environment  
LINK

The voice for Scotland's environment

Urgently introduce a Natural Environment Bill with legally binding nature recovery targets

Put funding in place to restore nature

Help communities to protect and restore their local environment

	Discussions on updates
35 minutes	Member updates: Your top 3 organisation updates that other members need to know about. 2 mins each max.
10 minutes	Thoughts and Summary of next steps Feedback forms & meeting close