

Scottish
Environment
LINK

Annual Report Summary
April 2023 to March 2024

A message from LINK's Chair, Charles Dundas

The 12 months between April 2023 and March 2024 at Scottish Environment LINK have been as busy as last year but with the added pressure of the environment being increasingly treated as an electoral wedge issue.

LINK and its members continue to raise the importance of a healthy planet, able to sustain nature as well as humans. While political commitment shrinks amid party political wrangling over governance and constitutional matters, we know that public support for the environment and for actions needed to conserve it grows. We build on that growing awareness and support and we continue to highlight the value of Scotland's natural resources and the need for urgent action to address the climate and nature crises.

This requires ongoing and increasingly high levels of intervention by LINK and its members. In order to manage that demand and meet it effectively, our new strategy to 2030, on which we've been working for the last 12 months, is designed to be able to prioritise and adapt so that LINK continues to be a strong voice for the environment. It puts LINK and our members in a good position for the future.

This marks my last full year as Chair of Scottish Environment LINK and as I prepare to step down in November 2024, I am pleased to be able to leave my tenure with LINK in a strong position, well respected and influential and certain that it is doing all it can to build a healthy environment for all, protected by policy that is designed with the environment in mind. Our success in future years will be tested by how much this policy is delivered.

A task I leave to my successors.



A message from LINK's Chief Officer, Deborah Long

We live in interesting times, but times that are very exciting to be part of the network that is LINK. 2023 into 2024 has been one of the worst for the spread of mis- and disinformation about the environment and the actions needed to pass a healthy fully functioning environment onto future generations. LINK has continued to engage with all parties, stakeholders and partners to build a consensus in favour of nature recovery. However, LINK and our members remain resource-constrained. In such circumstances, it is vitally important that we remain solutions focused, engaging with government and politicians on a cross-party basis, and working to keep nature recovery as a popular, mainstream demand.

By matching our much needed and welcomed advocacy work with more effort going into clearer and more impactful communications targeted to dispel untruths and discrepancies, the LINK network and our members are building shared resources and effectively targeted capacity. Here at LINK we've been providing campaign resource and know-how to our member organisations. We've brought more of the communication and campaign expertise directly into the staff team, where with our advocacy expertise, LINK is also able to offer more training and support to members to build a stronger and more influential sector.

This is how we will continue to support members as the world moves towards 2030 and the step changes that will be needed if we are to stay inside planetary boundaries. We know how to do this and we know we can: LINK's new strategy, developed this year, helps us stay on track through 2024 and beyond.



1 October 2024



Scottish Environment LINK the voice for Scotland's environment



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



Nature charities call on political leaders to increase ambition on environment

14 Aug 2023

A coalition of leading nature conservation and environmental charities has called on Scotland's political leaders to work together with increased ambition in the face of growing crises of climate and nature. The call, directed at the leaders of all five political parties, was made in an open letter signed by the leaders of 26 organisations. [...]

2023 – 2024 has been a difficult time for environmental campaigners across the UK, with the environment increasingly being treated as an electoral wedge issue. In a Scottish context this has been most apparent in the high-profile opposition to both the Deposit Return Scheme and Highly Protected Marine Areas, both of which were significant Scottish Government commitments that have collapsed.

This political background is why LINK has continued to engage with all parties to build a consensus in favour of nature recovery. In August we [wrote to all party leaders](#) calling for urgent action on the climate and nature crises, which was signed by 26 LINK members. Ahead of the Scottish Budget, LINK [coordinated a letter](#) raising concern over the impact of cumulative real-terms cuts on our environmental agencies. The issue was raised in parliament. Agency budgets were stronger than they would have been, as a result.

There remain significant opportunities in this parliament to 2026 for environmental victories, with developing legislation on agriculture, the circular economy, and nature targets. While the timetable for the Natural Environment Bill has slipped, we have productive engagement with the Scottish Government on the substance of the targets to come in the Bill. We are engaging with MSPs to persuade them of the case in principle for such an approach, through a new campaign, [Scotland Loves Nature](#), from summer 2024.

For a full description of all of LINK Groups work in 2023—2024, read our full annual report [here](#). Some examples include:

This year saw the **Deer Group** engage closely in the LINK ADMG [Common Ground](#) Forum, which has been hugely successful in building a much stronger and mutually effective relationship between LINK and ADMG members. Joint events and a letter on venison subsidies, as well as stronger interpersonal relationships have benefitted our advocacy work on deer and land management.

The **Food and Farming Group** put [significant effort](#) into responding to consultations on the Agriculture and Rural Communities Bill through 2023. This Bill remained a key priority for the network and passed Stage 1 in March 2024. As a framework Bill which will enable Ministers to make future regulations, it still lacked crucial information on how the new funding system will function and the Group remained highly engaged with MSPs in seeking to strengthen the Bill. Developments around climate targets strengthened our case of change in agricultural policy. The inclusion of capping powers should be noted as a significant victory for our network. However, disappointingly there was no inclusion of targets for pesticide and fertiliser reduction or organic land cover in the draft Bill. The published bill, in June 2024, incorporated the majority of our asks to some extent. The Group's advocacy work was supported by the [Farm for Scotland's Future](#) campaign activities.

The **Marine group** had a busy year, with a key part of the marine advocacy work focused on the Highly Protected Marine Areas. Their work included consultation responses, [briefings](#) and [blogs](#), MSP meetings and Marine Directorate meetings. 2023's Sea Scotland conference was well attended by 100 delegates: it was preceded by pre-events for young people, designed to help them navigate a conference setting and get more from the experience. This was reflected in the higher number of young people joining the conference this year.

The **Wildlife Group's** main focus was coordinating LINK wide input to the awaited consultation on the Scottish Biodiversity Strategy Framework and its delivery plan. A great deal of work was put into coordinating cross-network input into a number of Scottish government led workshops prior to the consultation and cross Group input into the [substantial consultation response](#). The Group also contributed to workshops on the Biodiversity Investment Plan and inputted into preparation for the Natural Environment Bill via support for the new campaign, Scotland Loves Nature. The group also supports delivery of the Nature Champions initiative.

The Year in Summary: Strategic Theme 2 - Strong Voice

Over the course of the year we published 15 reports, 9 briefings, 26 consultation responses, 3 pieces of written evidence, supplemented by oral evidence. We took part in a wide range of external stakeholder groups, listed [here](#); the member representatives and staff acting on behalf of the sector. We wrote to Minister and Government agencies, publishing 6 of these letters on our website. We published 21 Press releases, 25 blogs and commissioned 8 films. All of our work was posted on our [website](#) and information shared via social media channels.

LINK has been successful in maintaining regular quarterly LINK meetings with Cabinet Secretaries and Ministers. LINK meets other ministers regularly and as needed. We have strong links with Special Advisors for both Greens and SNP and regular meetings with senior officials from the Scottish Government and agencies. This increased familiarity at senior civil service level has meant LINK has been able to open more doors for members and facilitate their engagement in policy development.

[Nature Champions](#): 2023 was the 10th anniversary of Nature (formerly Species) Champions initiative, LINK's initiative to match MSPs with endangered or iconic Scottish species and habitats and thus raise nature's profile in Parliament.

By the end of March 2024, 71% of MSPs were Champions, covering 97 species and habitats. Activity included two group site visits supported by staff, including a visit to Scotland's rainforest in August 2023 and a peatland site visit in April 2024. These were hosted by member bodies. Publication of Autumn and Winter 2023 - 2024 [newsletters](#). MSPs Champions have raised nine Parliamentary motions and fifteen Parliamentary Questions, and several were involved in constituency activities.



[Save Scottish Seas](#) relaunched with its refreshed web pages to campaign and call for Marine Protected Area fisheries management measures to be completed with no further delays. The campaign ran two e-actions in 2023 - 2024 to demonstrate support for marine protection.

[Farm for Scotland's Future](#) is supported by 29 member bodies, is advised by three farming organisations and is supported by eight other organisations. The campaign published [reports](#), [blogs](#), [videos](#) and e-actions to coincide with the stages of the Agriculture and Rural Communities Bill. [Read our news item on the report](#).

In summer 2023, LINK's Equality, Diversity and Inclusion project - Nature For All, was at its halfway point. The [Nature for All resource hub](#) was developed through 2023 and launched in March 2024. Members can access all project materials, templates and links to helpful resources through the hub.

The Year in Summary: Strategic Theme 3 - Effective Network

LINK holds our networking and planning meetings online to support wide engagement from members located across Scotland. Attendance at the online Network meetings in July and December was high, with 40 member bodies, group representatives and several Honorary Fellows. These meetings focused on group work plans and the development of LINK's Strategic Plan 2024-2030, enabling maximum involvement and ownership of LINK's members.

LINK's Congress took place in Perth on 28 November, themed [Communities in Action](#). 41 people attended. In addition to the regular group meetings, over the summer period, LINK also held 8 workshops or training sessions with members to inform our advocacy on Just Transition, human right to a healthy environment, anti racism, finance for nature, Farm for Scotland's Future, advocacy training sessions and media training. We also held a series of workshops with LINK's Board, members and staff team to refresh our strategic plan.

A fundamental way of working for LINK is through strategic partnerships and alliances with other networks: this helps us to build a strong and effective voice for Scotland's environment outside of the usual eNGO voices. During the year, LINK campaigns, including Circular Scotland, Save Scottish Seas and Farm for Scotland's Future were supported by more than 37 other organisations. LINK regularly supports other networks including Stop Climate Chaos Scotland, Future Fisheries Alliance and Scotland's Rainforest Alliance and provides the secretariat for two Cross Party Groups at Scottish Parliament on Circular Economy and Nature and Climate.

Collaboration with the Environment Links UK remained strong, with regular Director catch ups, including a face to face meeting in Birmingham, which focussed on cross border UK work.

Over the year we liaised widely with colleagues in the Government, Parliament and the agencies in pursuit of environmental sustainability. This included strong relationships with all environmental agencies in Scotland and relevant Government Directorates. We continued our partnership working with environmental and heritage funders, including Environment Funders Scotland to broaden understanding of needs and opportunities in Scotland.

LINK in numbers

Our work was supported by:

14 staff members

39 Honorary Fellows

Oversight was provided by 10 trustees



50.5% of costs are supported in member fees and in kind support



Voluntary engagement within the network equalled 1363 days of work or £365,765 in financial terms



74 consultation responses, briefings, reports, position papers and press releases

34 press mentions

155 meetings held with ministers, politicians of all parties, and colleagues in the statutory agencies and civil society organisations

Farm for Scotland's Future Campaign supported by 29 members and 12 other organisations



41 member bodies took part in our 15 groups and 42 member events



Nature Champions

92 MSPs support 98 species and habitats and were involved in 101 PQs, motions, mentions, site visits, meetings and media contributions

25 blogs and 8 films produced



95% of members engaged in at least one work area

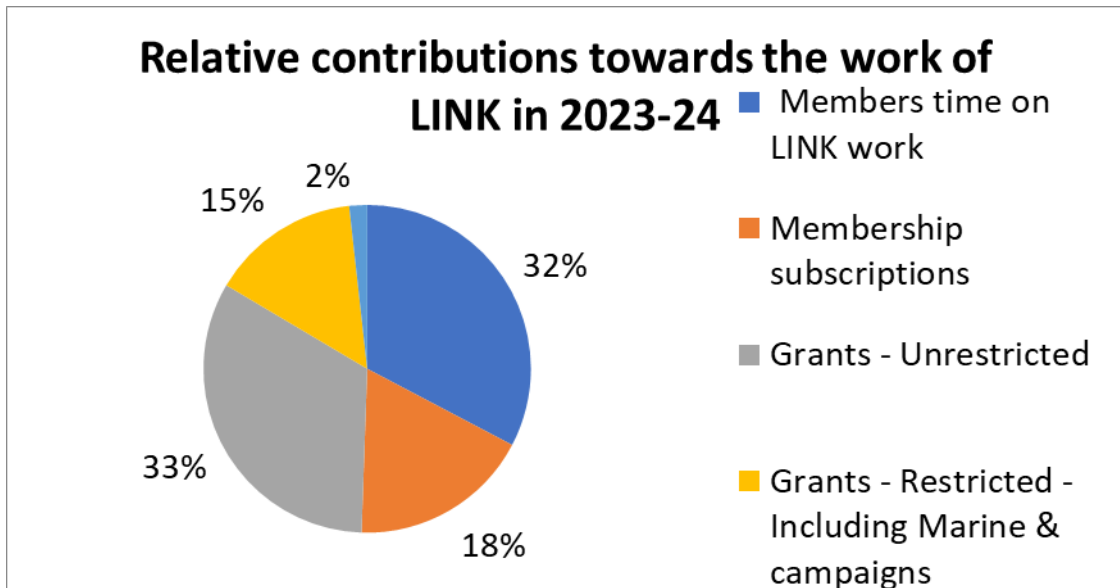
9 conferences and webinars held

6 organisational supporters engaged

LINK was engaged across 49 external stakeholder groups



Finances in summary



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

Looking Ahead

With the environment having been used twice during 2023 into 2024 as a wedge issue, where communities and audiences have been split by interest groups promoting untruths and deceptive rhetoric, LINK is looking forward having learnt some lessons and ready to apply new tactics. We know that as a sector we must prioritise how and when we use our limited resources to prevent being blown off track by those who wish to suck energy and focus from the sector. We also know that we must be proactive, communicate more clearly and directly with impacted groups and provide them with the tools and actions to become part of the voice for Scotland's environment.

As we move into 2025 and the next Scottish election, we are focusing on areas of policy where change is needed. Sometimes this will be through the development of new policy. But often it will be about delivery: implementing action already embedded into policy that if enacted would help Scotland move much more decisively towards the global climate and nature goals.

In 2025, we will also be half way through the UN Decade for Ecosystem Restoration and we anticipate that public pressure for effective action will increase. In Scotland, there is huge potential to build on the strong policy work in the recent past, much of it embedded in the Bute House Agreement, and to become a real leader in climate and biodiversity. However, for that, Scotland needs to deliver and we will be focussing on highlighting the opportunities for delivery as well as identifying where we, as a nation, can do more.

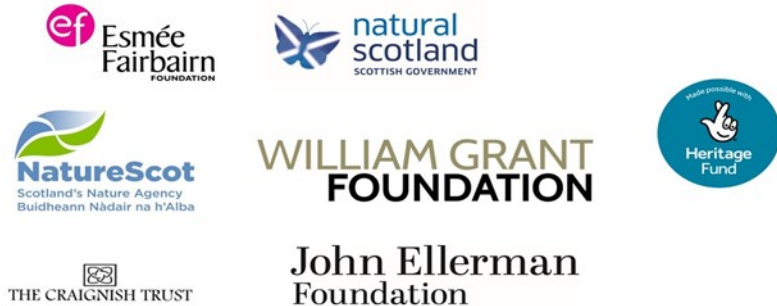
As we roll out our own new strategy, LINK will continue to seek to work with other networks and initiatives across Scotland. We are delighted that LINK is attracting and welcoming new members into the network and we aim to continue to do this and welcome new organisational supporters too. This is a key part of our role in being a strong voice for Scotland's environment, wherever we can and supporting everyone in Scotland to be a part of that voice. Our close relationships with our sister Links in the three UK countries and through our UK members will continue to inform our advocacy here in Scotland and in Westminster.

Our members and our staff team are always our strength and in supporting them to be and do the best they can is a fundamental part of LINK's approach. We extend this approach to our MSP Nature Champions, now going into their final years of the current Parliament. We will be working with them to ensure their voice for nature is heard into the next elections. When we relaunch the initiative for the next new MSP intake, we'll be building on the strong and successful foundation of the last 10 years.

The fundamental basis of our success however is our members and our work to support them to be more equal, more inclusive and more diverse is a key part of our work to build a stronger sector, able to have a greater impact for environmental good. Ultimately, it will ensure we build a bigger and much stronger voice for Scotland's environment.

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 50% of total contributions. We are very grateful to all LINK's core and project funders over the period, including member bodies.



Orsted, Crown Estate Scotland, Sea Changers, Hutcheon's School, Scottish Power, University of Stirling.

And our members: Woodland Trust Scotland, Scottish Wildlife Trust, RSPB Scotland, WWF Scotland, National Trust for Scotland also supported LINK work.

Thanks to LINK members and supporters

