

framework

**Scottish Environment LINK
Strategy Refresh, 2012**

**Findings from Questionnaire Survey and
Interviews with Audiences and Partners**

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Framework

1 May 2012

www.framework.org.uk

1. Introduction

This report summarises the main findings from an online questionnaire survey and interviews which were conducted with external stakeholders to inform the strategy refresher of Scottish Environment LINK. The initiative was commissioned by the Board of Trustees of Scottish Environment LINK and conducted by an independent consultant - Bruce Britton of Framework. Bruce had previous experience of working with LINK in 2005 and again in 2008 on the development of the network's corporate strategy.

2. Consultant's Brief

The consultant was provided with the following brief.

“Scottish Environment LINK wishes to commission a brief review amongst audiences and partners to assess perceptions of LINK's role and effectiveness as a network and its impact on policy and public debate about the environment as part of mainstream public policy in Scotland.

LINK board and Members see current strategy as still relevant and propose to refresh, rather than substantively revise, that strategy.

The outcomes of the proposed review, together with results of a recent member survey (results to be provided to consultant) will inform the next three-year strategy from summer 2012 to summer 2015.

The contractor is asked to survey a representative cross-section of individuals amongst LINK's target audiences and partners, through a combination as appropriate of email, phone, written survey and face-to-face interviews, providing LINK with a report on the response which provides statistical information as well as an evaluation of the commentary received.

Questioning should cover LINK's three strategic objective 'areas': a sustainable Scotland, acting as a strong voice for the environment, and being an efficient and effective and accountable network. It will be helpful if questioning elicits how, and how well, interviewees know the network, how much they respect the network and its activities, and how they rate its impact on relevant debate and policy development.”

Due to time and budget constraints it was agreed that face-to-face interviews would not be practical. Hence the review used telephone interviews and a questionnaire survey only.

3. Acknowledgements

The consultant wishes to express appreciation to the individuals who agreed to be interviewed and to those who completed the online questionnaire survey. Many thanks also to Jen Anderson, Chief Officer of Scottish Environment LINK for her support throughout the review.

4. Methodology

The data-gathering involved three methods:

A questionnaire survey of LINK target audiences and partners. The survey was devised by the consultant in close consultation with the LINK Chief Officer. In order to encourage responses, the number of questions was limited to ten and most questions were designed to enable 'tick box' answers. Invitations to complete the online survey were sent out to 45 individuals on 30 March 2012. Responses were invited over a three-week period from 30 March- 20 April 2012. A reminder email was sent out on 16 April. Seventeen individuals completed the survey (a response rate of 38%).

Telephone interviews were requested with 16 carefully selected individuals who are key LINK target audiences and partners. A total of 64 possible interview slots were made available over a two week period from 9 April 2012 to 20 April 2012 using 'Doodle'. A reminder email was sent out on 16 April in which recipients were offered the opportunity to complete the questionnaire survey if they preferred. Interview protocols were customised for each individual interviewee, based on the questions in the on-line survey and a briefing provided by the LINK Chief Officer. The telephone interviews lasted between 20 and 40 minutes. Three individuals agreed to be interviewed (a response rate of 19%).

Document study The consultant was provided with the results of the 2012 LINK member survey and a number of LINK's recent documents as background information for this review.

5. Findings from Questionnaire Survey

The findings from the online questionnaire survey and interviews are presented in this section.

4.1 Who completed the survey?

A total of 17 people completed the survey. Of these, two did not provide their name and contact details.

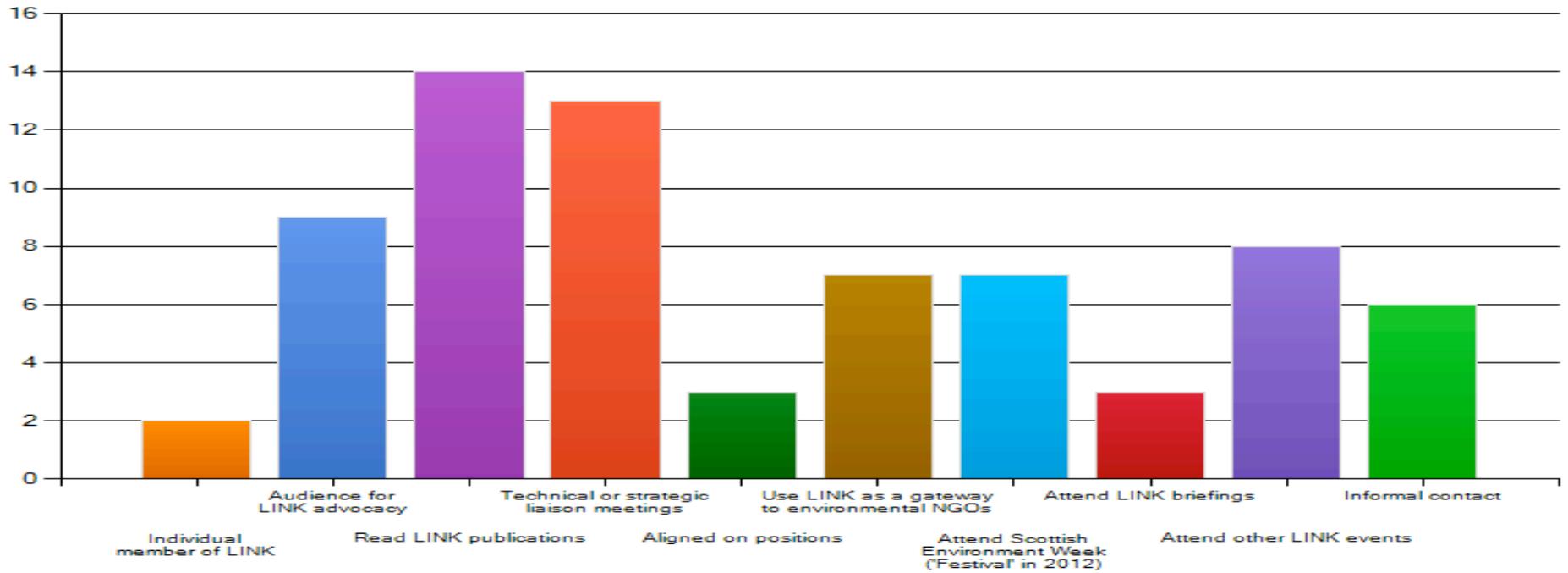
A full list of respondents can be found as Annex 1.

4.2 Question 2: What has been the nature of your contact with Scottish Environment LINK?

Sixteen people responded to this question.

Respondents were asked to indicate the different ways in which they have contact with LINK. Each respondent could select up to 10 channels that were relevant to them so this question provided an indication of how well-connected the respondents are with LINK and its views. The average number of 'channels of contact' that individuals have with LINK is between 4 and 5 (with three individuals reporting that they have contact through 7 or 8 channels). This suggests that LINK does a good job of keeping communication with respondents open in a range of ways. The most common form of contact reported by respondents was 'Reading LINK publications' (reported by 14 respondents), followed closely by 'Technical or strategic liaison meetings' reported by 13 respondents.

What has been the nature of your contact with Scottish Environment LINK? Please tick all that apply.



4.3 Question 3: The following statements relate to the ambitions LINK has about the different aspects of its role. To what extent do you disagree or agree about whether LINK is achieving these ambitions?

Seventeen people responded to this question.

The question listed twelve statements including ones related to LINK's strategic ambitions and asked respondents to state to what degree they disagreed or agreed about whether LINK is achieving its ambitions.

The overwhelming majority of responses were 'agree' (58% overall) or strongly agree' (27% overall) with the statements, suggesting that LINK is successfully achieving its ambitions in the eyes of respondents. The two statements that attracted the highest percentage of strong agreement were 'LINK provides a strong voice for the environment.' (37%) and 'LINK plays an important role in scrutinising the record of government in sustainable development' (35%).

No respondents 'strongly disagreed' with the statements and in only four cases did respondents 'disagree'. The areas of disagreement related to 'LINK builds strong relationships with all relevant stakeholders on the issues it addresses' (2 disagree), 'LINK provides a strong voice for the environment' (2 disagree), 'LINK acts as an efficient and accountable network' (1 disagree) and 'Scottish Environment Week provides a valuable opportunity for networking, awareness-raising and celebration' (1 disagree).

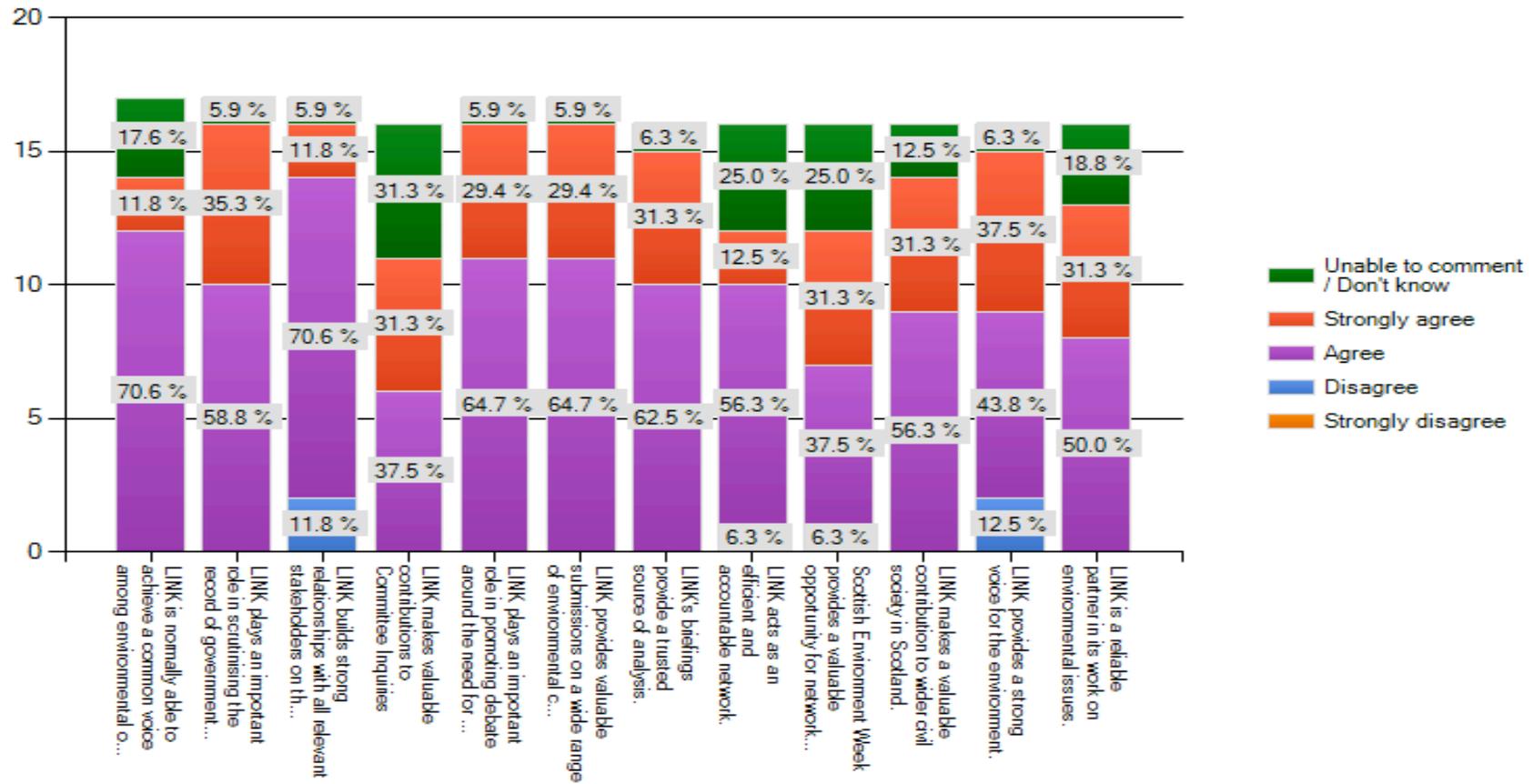
The following three comments were made:

"I did not find the categories very helpful and in many cases neither agree or disagree apply, as there are examples of both. So I have put in a couple of "disagree" answers which are hiding the fact that there is evidence to support "agree" and vice versa.

"Promote internal debate that allows outside stakeholders to make submissions to help."

"You need a neutral category between disagree and agree – I haven't completed this section because it does not allow me to accurately reflect my views."

The following statements relate to the ambitions LINK has about the different aspects of its role. To what extent do you disagree or agree about whether LINK is achieving these ambitions?



4.4 Question 4: What roles could LINK begin to play (or play more than at present) that would make a greater contribution to good environmental governance in Scotland?

Thirteen people responded to this question.

In this question, each respondent could make up to three suggestions. The responses have been categorised under five headings. The responses are verbatim and have been numbered for ease of reference. The responses suggest that:

- LINK should consider taking a more challenging scrutiny role in its work and to broaden its audiences with more focus beyond policy-makers.
- The role of the general public in influencing decision-makers – particularly with a majority government – may need further consideration by LINK.
- LINK should consider taking more of a role in facilitating new forms of dialogue with and between parties that have opposing interests or are normally peripheral in policy debates.
- LINK should consider ways to become more strongly associated in the minds of its audiences with success stories and examples of effective collaboration ie a solution focus.
- LINK should continue its professional approach to providing evidence to support its views. However, agility and speed of response may, at times, be more important than marshalling detailed evidence.

CHALLENGING / SCRUTINY
1. Greater focus on implementation by Government of existing legislation and less focus on new legislation
2. LINK can provide a challenge to government but the closer it gets to politicians and the processes of government the harder it is to provide robust challenge in public. I wonder if LINK has achieved the best balance in this.
3. Be a bit less 'nice'
4. Questioning the increasingly technocratic framing of environmental issues in politics
5. Needs to be more vocal about public spending on the environment - whether in agriculture support, community support, local authority funding for environmental activities including ranger services, or funding for public agencies
TARGETING / AUDIENCES

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6. Get to MSPs who don't normally respond to environmental issues
7. Instead of simply acting as another voice for the environmental lobby, it could create a space for better dialogue between traditionally opposed interests. At present it looks like a good ruse to simply get another seat at the table. But Link could actually do something different.
8. Discussing directly and promoting better environmental management with other marine interests
9. Working with people to advocate the relevance of the environment to people and place
10. Other steps it could take to raise awareness of its aims and activities among the Scottish public
AWARENESS RAISING ABOUT SUCCESSES
11. More pro-active promotion of stories
12. Needs to promote examples of positive delivery and action more often and more widely - and not just by its own members
13. More vocal and visible support for improvements made in Scotland on seal protection (environment usually represented by animal welfare interests)
14. Promotion of the benefits of MPAs
INTERNAL WAYS OF WORKING
15. Needs to be quicker at speaking out on its position on topical issues rather than just working behind the scenes or producing periodic briefings and reports
16. Not entirely sure about this, but it could do more to explain its role to the membership of the member-organisations
17. Not always striving for total consensus
18. The diversity of NGOs and the often narrow remits they have can obscure environmental messages. I wonder if through LINK these various bodies might be encouraged to unite and even combine resources more visibly. I resist saying "merge" as that is way beyond LINK's remit. The various LINK working groups sometimes get close to providing this.
19. Evidence is king. LINK needs to focus more on bringing forward evidence to support environmental action and investment.
CHANGE MODUS OPERANDI
20. It could perform more of a 'think tank' role than a lobbying one. i.e. produce thoughtful analyses of the issues and the different routes to achieve change, rather than the current pushing of particular bandwagons
21. Take on a more 3rd sector type role and start undertaking Government work where appropriate

4.5 Question 5: Over the past three years, LINK has been actively engaged in advocacy in a number of environmental policy areas. Please assess the influence of LINK's contributions to these policy debates.

Seventeen people responded to this question.

The question listed twelve environmental policy areas (agreed with the LINK Chief Officer) which have provided an active focus for LINK's advocacy activities over the past 2-3 years. Respondents were asked to assess the influence of LINK's contributions to the debates as it was felt that it would be difficult for respondents to assess LINK's influence on the outcomes of the debates. The two policy areas in which LINK was assessed to have been 'very influential' were the Climate Change (Scotland) Act and the Marine (Scotland) Act. In only one of the twelve policy areas listed (The environment and preventative spend) was LINK assessed (by one respondent) as 'Not influential' and in 7 areas LINK was assessed to have had 'Little influence' by between one and three respondents.

Perhaps unsurprisingly (as some respondents may have limited awareness of LINK's work outside their specific area of policy interest), there were a large number of 'Unable to comment/Don't know' responses, with the highest level concerning 'The environment and preventative spend'.

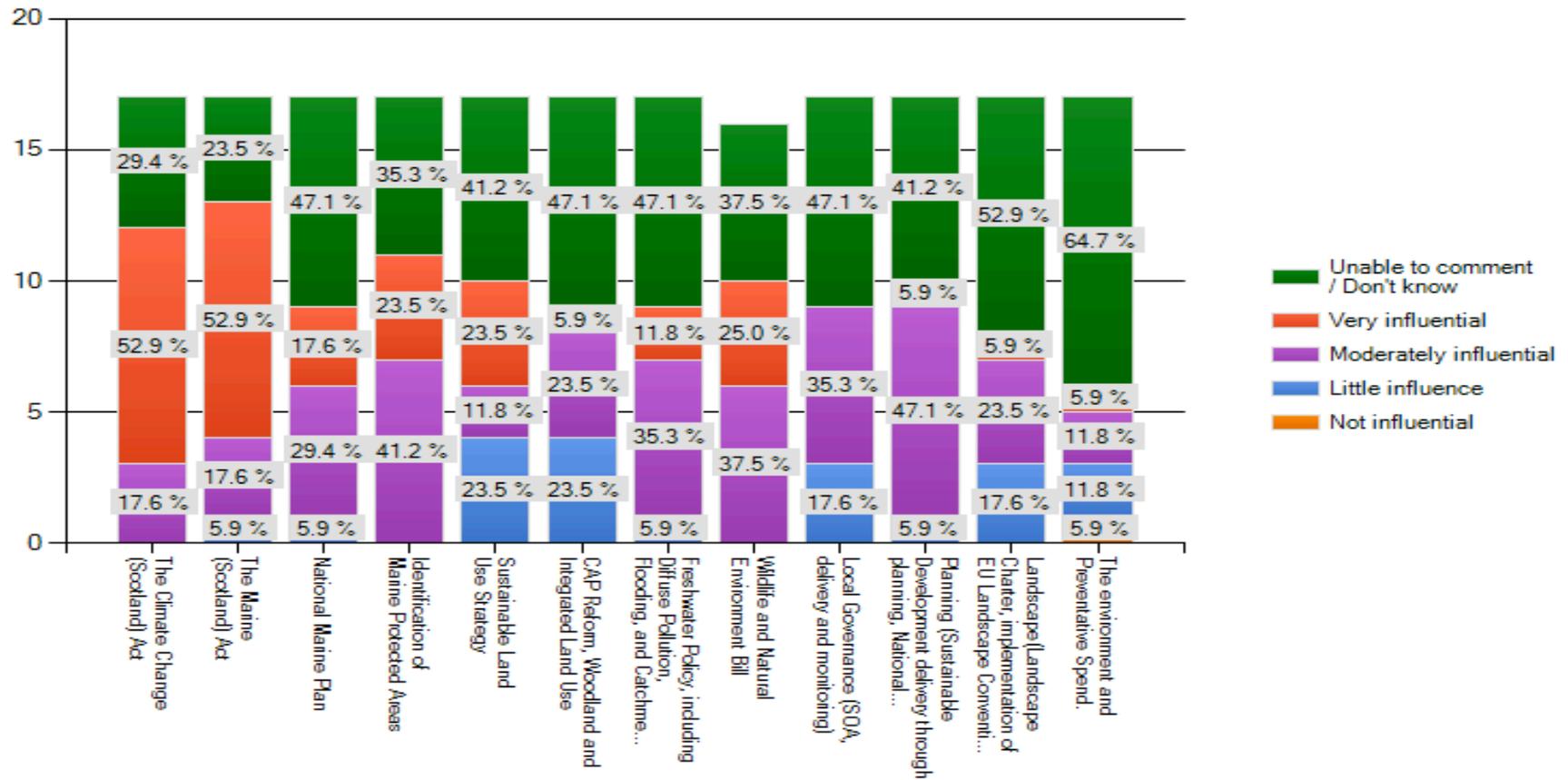
The following three comments were made:

"I answer these questions while thinking, "you can take a horse to water". Sometimes we need to think more about creating receptive listeners than about what we need them to hear. Unfortunately the audience can change with every election and we can forget to go back to the first stage. LINK and its members are generally good in both regards but this won't always be the case. The economic situation doesn't make the job any easier, and being very influential is beyond any one group or organisation so need to work on partnerships and cross-sector support."

"Although this is covered by the CAP, I think LINK has had a strong influence on the development of the SRDP - Scotland Rural Development Programme"

"Access legislation - very influential"

Over the past three years, LINK has been actively engaged in advocacy in a number of environmental policy areas. Please assess the influence of LINK's contributions to these policy debates.



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Over the past three years, LINK has been actively engaged in advocacy in a number of environmental policy areas. Please assess the influence of LINK's contributions to these policy debates.

Answer Options	Not influential	Little influence	Moderately influential	Very influential	Unable to comment / Don't know	Response Count
The Climate Change (Scotland) Act	0	0	3	9	5	17
The Marine (Scotland) Act	0	1	3	9	4	17
National Marine Plan	0	1	5	3	8	17
Identification of Marine Protected Areas	0	0	7	4	6	17
Sustainable Land Use Strategy	0	4	2	4	7	17
CAP Reform, Woodland and Integrated Land Use	0	4	4	1	8	17
Freshwater Policy, including Diffuse Pollution, Flooding, and Catchment Management	0	1	6	2	8	17
Wildlife and Natural Environment Bill	0	0	6	4	6	16
Local Governance (SOA, delivery and monitoring)	0	3	6	0	8	17
Planning (Sustainable Development delivery through planning, National Planning Framework)	0	1	8	1	7	17
Landscape (Landscape Charter, implementation of EU Landscape Convention, Landscape Mapping)	0	3	4	1	9	17
The environment and Preventative Spend.	1	2	2	1	11	17
Other:						3

4.6 Question 6: Over the past three years, LINK has produced a number of documents to inform debate on important environmental issues. For each of the following documents, please mark each statement that you agree with. You can mark as many statements as you wish on each row.

Seventeen people responded to this question.

There appears to be a generally low level of awareness of LINK publications outside the specialist field of each individual respondent with a mean of over half of the respondents unable to comment about each document. For those who were familiar with the documents, the feedback was very positive, with only a very small number of critical comments made about *Scotland's Environmental Laws Since Devolution* ('overlooked important issues' (2)); *Governance Matters* ('overlooked important issues' (1)); *Acting Locally* ('Added little to the debate' (1)); *A Crunch Time for CAP* ('overlooked important issues' (1)); and *Making the Case for Sound Management of MPAs* ('added little to the debate' (1)). It is worth noting that the same documents also attracted positive comments – the mix is understandable given their intended purpose.

The following four comments were made:

"I can only comment about how much these have influenced me and those I have dealt with, so I have left that column blank. Going back to my previous comment though, influence is a difficult thing to measure often it happens incrementally. I wouldn't say any of the above documents were ground-breaking."

"I have to say I don't remember having seen or read any of these documents. That may be my fault! But it looks like they have not had much profile"

"Report on sound management of MPAs would have benefited from contractor making time to become more aware of current work of Marine Scotland, SNH and JNCC on MPAs"

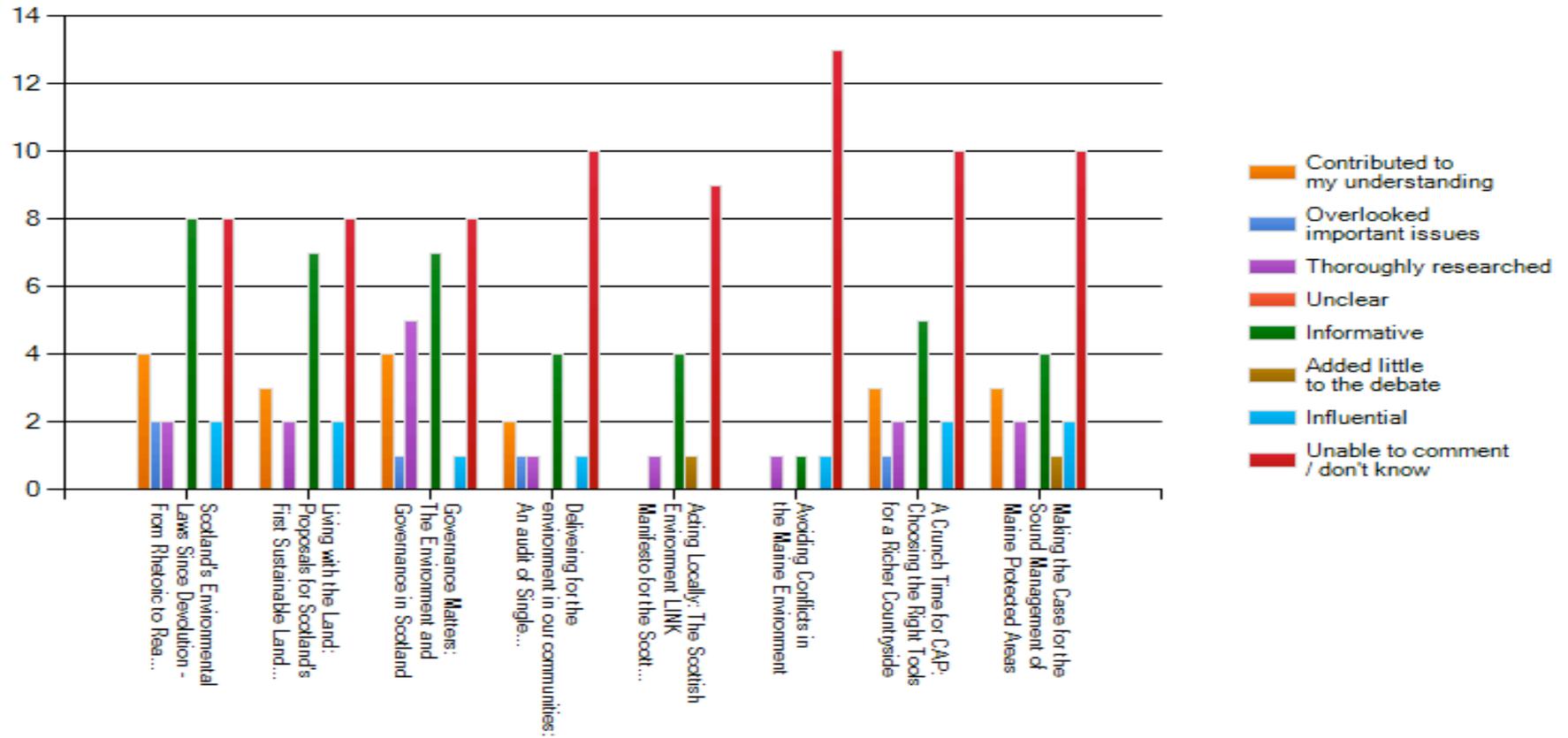
"Governance report - a council of perfection - didn't seem to recognise the resource limits on MSPs and the Parliament. Institutional arrangements also relevant (1 house, 2 houses etc; role of the Cttees in a majority Government). Emphasis on scrutiny of legislation in one way or another - but legislation/regulation is only one tool in the box (and may not be the best one in some cases). So whilst informative to some degree, it missed some key points and overall I found it unconvincing (even though this is a vital area for debate). Laws since devolution - I felt this missed an opportunity to critique the role of legislation in progress to sustainable development. The approach to environmental issues in the UK has been increasingly technocratic over the last 50-60 years - making it difficult for most people to engage with or to see the relevance of it. This is a key question to address - and critiquing the implementation of legislation (as if it is the only thing that matters) may not help to address the more fundamental problems..."

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Over the past three years, LINK has produced a number of documents to inform debate on important environmental issues. For each of the following documents, please mark each statement that you agree with. You can mark as many statements as you wish on each row.

Answer Options	Contributed to my understanding	Overlooked important issues	Thoroughly researched	Unclear	Informative	Added little to the debate	Influential	Unable to comment / don't know	Response Count
Scotland's Environmental Laws Since Devolution - From Rhetoric to Reality	4	2	2	0	8	0	2	8	16
Living with the Land: Proposals for Scotland's First Sustainable Land Use Strategy	3	0	2	0	7	0	2	8	16
Governance Matters: The Environment and Governance in Scotland	4	1	5	0	7	0	1	8	16
Delivering for the environment in our communities: An audit of Single Outcome Agreements	2	1	1	0	4	0	1	10	16
Acting Locally: The Scottish Environment LINK Manifesto for the Scottish Council Elections, 2012	0	0	1	0	4	1	0	9	14
Avoiding Conflicts in the Marine Environment	0	0	1	0	1	0	1	13	16
A Crunch Time for CAP: Choosing the Right Tools for a Richer Countryside	3	1	2	0	5	0	2	10	16
Making the Case for the Sound Management of Marine Protected Areas	3	0	2	0	4	1	2	10	17
Any comments?									5

Over the past three years, LINK has produced a number of documents to inform debate on important environmental issues. For each of the following documents, please mark each statement that you agree with. You can mark as many statements as you wish on each row.



4.7 Question 7: The following statements have been made by key decision makers about LINK and its work. Please place a tick in each row according to how much you disagree or agree with each of the statements.

Seventeen people responded to this question.

Six statements that had been made by key decision makers (including politicians) to support LINK funding applications were chosen to provide third-party assessments of LINK's overall value and profile. Respondents were not aware of the sources of these statements. Time constraints meant that it was not possible to source critical quotes made about LINK but the question was constructed to provide the option of disagreeing with the statement before agreeing with it.

Overall, the statements attracted high levels of agreement (53%) and strong agreement (31%) – a combined mean for agreement of 84%. Two statements attracted the highest level of 'strongly agree': "If LINK did not exist then I for one should certainly recommend to the various environmental campaigning groups that they form such an organisation." (8) and "Scottish Environment LINK have proved invaluable in helping to build strong relationships between politicians and environmental organisations." (7). The statement "LINK (and LINK members') briefings are among the most focussed and professional parliamentarians receive and their lobbying activities are among the most professional by far" attracted the lowest level of agreement/strong agreement (60%). This is explained by the high proportion (40%) of 'No opinion/Don't know' responses.

There was only one 'disagree' response recorded for this question and that concerned the statement "I found the breadth and depth of expertise that LINK and its members could bring to a very wide range of often quite technical policy debates invaluable."

The following four comments were made:

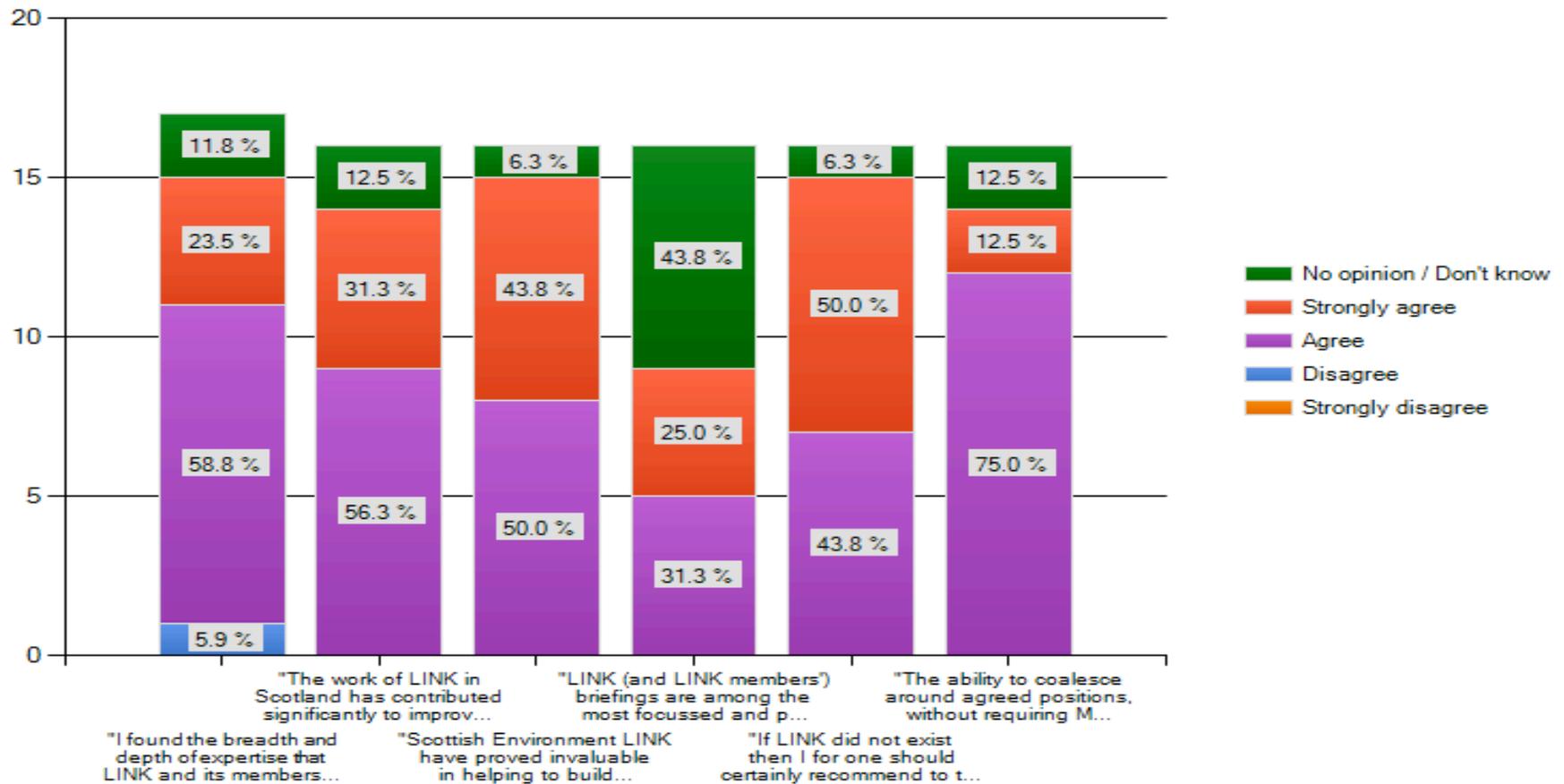
"I would like to explain the don't knows. (I do have an opinion on both issues.) I cannot comment on the briefings to parliamentarians because I don't see enough of the other material they get from other interests and sectors. LINK certainly provides good briefings, but I can't offer a comparison with others. The issue of coalescence is very interesting. Sometimes a consensus (or a perception of consensus) is enough to generate positive action. Sometimes it is visible dissent that challenges people to change and improve. LINK and its member bodies cannot expect to adopt just one of these tactics all the time. So while I don't advocate disagreement I would accept that at times revealing it can be helpful, providing the ensuing debate is about finding the common ground or demonstrating why it doesn't exist. So I agree with the statement in relation to some issues and not with others.

"I think LINK has become notably more effective in many of these things over the past few (five or so) years"

"There are some who think that LINK, as distinct from its member bodies, can be politically naive and lacking authority in its behind the scenes negotiations and tactics. I think there have been some mis-handlings, arising from a lack of confidence - they should get more experienced people to do these negotiations. LINK's one weakness really is the lack of an experienced operator of this kind on the staff. I wouldn't argue with the priority that they have placed in having a secretariat extremely skilled in 'herding cats', but it does leave them a bit exposed in a way that can damage the reputation of the organisation for professionalism and political savvy."

"See [statement] 6 - the need to understand and evaluate the way that environment has played in UK (and Scottish) politics over the years."

The following statements have been made by key decision makers about LINK and its work. Please place a tick in each row according to how much you disagree or agree with each of the statements.



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The following statements have been made by key decision makers about LINK and its work. Please place a tick in each row according to how much you disagree or agree with each of the statements.

Answer Options	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly agree	No opinion / Don't know	Response Count
"I found the breadth and depth of expertise that LINK and its members could bring to a very wide range of often quite technical policy debates invaluable."	0	1	10	4	2	17
"The work of LINK in Scotland has contributed significantly to improving environmental legislation and protection."	0	0	9	5	2	16
"Scottish Environment LINK have proved invaluable in helping to build strong relationships between politicians and environmental organisations."	0	0	8	7	1	16
"LINK (and LINK members') briefings are among the most focussed and professional parliamentarians receive and their lobbying activities are among the most professional by far."	0	0	5	4	7	16
"If LINK did not exist then I for one should certainly recommend to the various environmental campaigning groups that they form such an organisation."	0	0	7	8	1	16
"The ability to coalesce around agreed positions, without requiring Ministers or MSPs having to arbitrate between the specific concerns of individual members, is a particular strength as is the willingness to work with other stakeholders to reach compromises which allow multiple benefits to be achieved."	0	0	12	2	2	16
Any comments?						4

4.8 Question 8: For an organisation that will be 25 this year, how would you assess LINK's overall contribution to policy development concerning environmental issues and progress towards Scotland's sustainable development?

Seventeen people responded to this question

The responses demonstrate that the clarity and quality of LINK's contributions are recognised and highly valued by respondents. Over 80% of respondents viewed both the clarity and the quality of LINK's contributions as high or very high. In none of the four categories did respondents score LINK's contribution as low or very low. Since only two respondents felt unable to comment this suggests an informed assessment by the respondents.

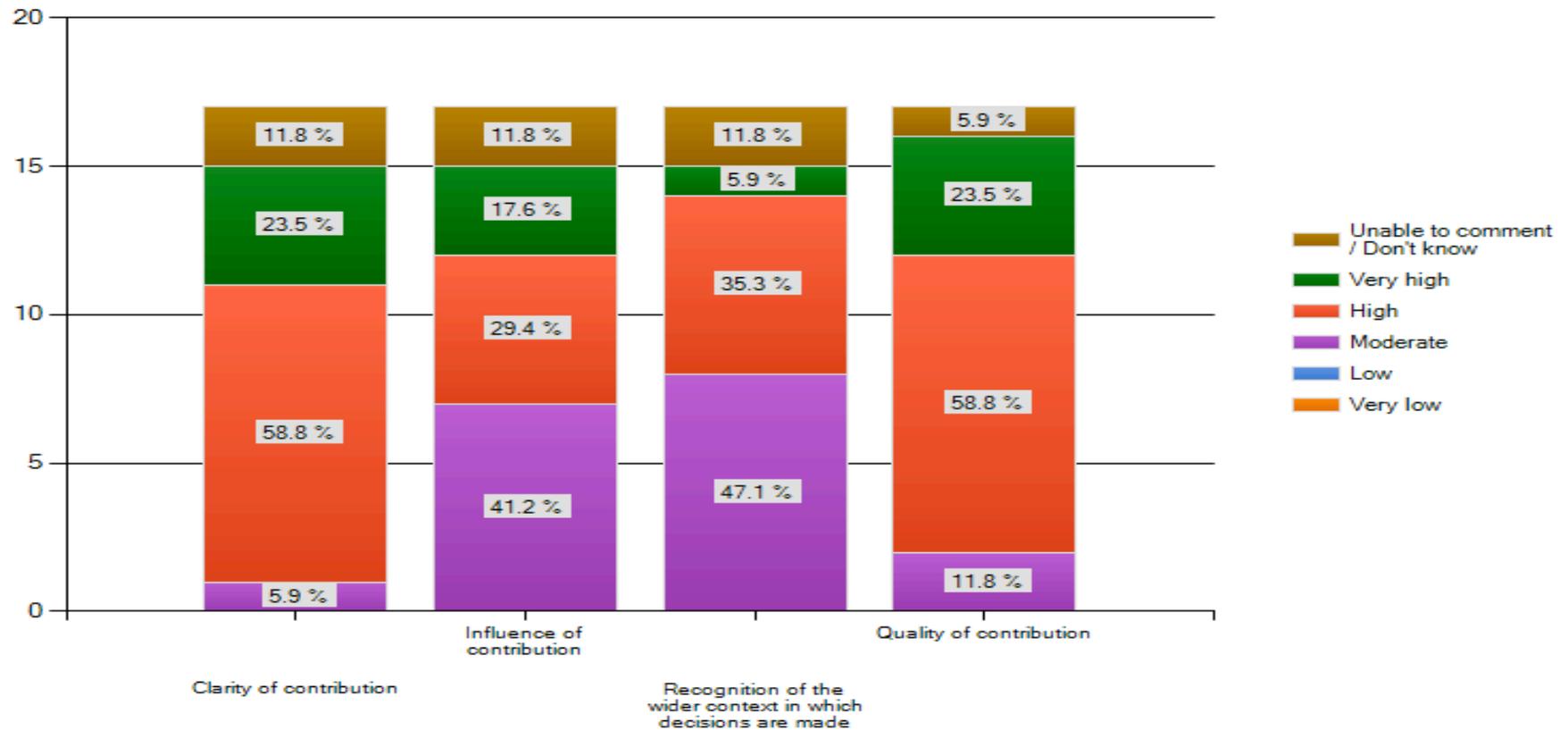
The area that received the lowest assessment was not 'influence' as might have been expected (given the difficulty of making that judgement or the possible unwillingness of respondents to admit LINK's influence) but the 'Recognition of the wider context in which decisions are made' where the mean response lay midway between 'Moderate' and 'High'. This may suggest a perceived limitation to LINK's awareness of wider factors influencing decisions. It may equally represent some respondents' view of a network that is, by its nature, making judgement calls about the factors that really matter in complex policy debates. However, there is potential here for LINK to further develop its contribution to policy development.

One additional comment was made:

"These answers might appear to be a little critical. LINK is a vital part of the organisational landscape of Scotland. It has done good things for many years. There has been some very significant new legislation. Many environmental indicators show improvements. We no longer have to fight cases from first principles. LINK has contributed to this, and when compared to some other countries we are doing ok. But there is still a long way to go. Between them LINK bodies have too many small targets and such a diversity of causes that it is hard for those outside the network to fully understand where the priorities lie. So I would challenge LINK to think now if there is a new business model for the voluntary sector that could bring about a step change in the next 25 years."

For an organisation that will be 25 this year, how would you assess LINK's overall contribution to policy development concerning environmental issues and progress towards Scotland's sustainable development?								
Answer Options	Very low	Low	Moderate	High	Very high	Unable to comment / Don't know	Rating Average	Response Count
Clarity of contribution	0	0	1	10	4	2	4.20	17
Influence of contribution	0	0	7	5	3	2	3.73	17
Recognition of the wider context in which decisions are made	0	0	8	6	1	2	3.53	17
Quality of contribution	0	0	2	10	4	1	4.13	17
Comments:								1

For an organisation that will be 25 this year, how would you assess LINK's overall contribution to policy development concerning environmental issues and progress towards Scotland's sustainable development?



4.9 Question 9: Please list three important challenges facing the environment in Scotland in the next 3-4 years concerning which LINK could make a valuable contribution.

Fourteen people responded to this question.

The question was devised to include the phrase 'concerning which LINK could make a valuable contribution' in order to provide suggestions that LINK may wish to consider in its next strategic period. The responses have been categorised under eight headings. The wording of the responses are reported verbatim and have been individually numbered for ease of reference.

The responses suggest:

- Given the current economic and independence agendas, the environment has slipped down the political agenda. Maintaining and building public support is seen as essential.
- Making stronger connections with issues such as health and culture may be a valuable way of building the profile of (and public support for) the environment in the current political and economic climate.
- Marine issues are particularly important for Scotland and opportunities should be explored for building dialogue between diverse stakeholders.
- Renewables remains an important and sensitive topic, particularly with deadlines for tough emissions targets looming.
- CAP reform provides a key source of resources for conservation and access. The sector needs to be aware of the far-reaching implications that CAP reform will have.
- There is a need for new thinking to help policy-makers deal with new conceptual approaches to the environment such as ecosystem services.

PUBLIC SUPPORT/POLITICAL PROFILE (6)

1. Getting the environment back at the top of the political agenda, by devising compelling stories which attract people across the environment/development divide
2. Maintaining the political profile of the environment
3. Relevance of the environment to big political questions (health, wellbeing etc)
4. How the environment is framed in political debate (from technocratic to popular?)
5. Public money and deployment of regulatory devices must show direct public benefit. Defining and justifying benefits from the environment cannot be taken for granted and there is a challenge to us all to demonstrate why money and effort should be invested in environmental

causes.

6. Independence referendum
7. Making links with the SG's economic agenda - but not becoming a slave to it.
8. Prioritisation of development over environment.

SPENDING / BUDGET (6)

9. Spending priorities - recognising the value of nature for Scotland
10. Defining environmental priorities - not just adding to a growing list
11. Re-thinking strategic priorities in a declining budget
12. Role of the environment in preventative spend
13. Cuts to the sector
14. Reduced resources at all levels

MARINE (6)

15. Working with fishing and other marine industries
16. Promoting the benefits of marine planning
17. Marine environment - achieving the environmental ambitions of the Marine Strategy in the face of economic pressures
18. Marine environment
19. Public consultation on MPA proposals and promoting benefits of MPAs
20. Management of MPAs with Sustainable Industries e.g. Renewables

ENERGY/RENEWABLES (5)

21. Energy security
22. Development of Sustainable Offshore Renewable Energy
23. Renewable development
24. Promoting renewable energy

25. Likely undershoot on green power production commitments + desperate measures to make up ground

CAP/AGRICULTURE (5)

26. CAP Reform

27. CAP reform potentially holds the key to the resources required for conservation and access. Winning them will be hard but worth the effort.

28. CAP reform

29. Shape of measures under new round of CAP/SRDP

30. Agriculture - sustaining food production whilst improving the health of Scotland's countryside

THE CHANGING FRAMEWORK FOR DECISION MAKING (1)

31. As we move to consideration of ecosystem services and concepts of natural capital we will need new language, new measures and new targets. Defining these will require new thinking too.

SPECIFIC FOCUS ISSUES

32. Develop peatland

33. Woodland expansion

34. Air pollution

35. Deer management reform

36. Landscape Management and Tourism

4.10 Question 10: Any other comments

Three people responded to this question.

"I resisted mentioning invasive non-native species, biodiversity losses, landscape quality changes, climate change etc. Of course these are challenges, and if they weren't we would have others - afforestation, deforestation, water quality issues etc. The fact is that the nature of the problem has generally been our concern rather than need to identify relevant outcomes."

"LINK is a stronger and more effective influence than it has ever been in the past, and I value its influence. Keep up the good work. It perhaps needs to represent the concerns and interests of member organisations in a more balanced way - and they perhaps need to trust each other more (I'm sure it's well aware of this as an issue). There is (as was always the case) sometimes a tendency for RSPB to dominate, and there are quite often times

when RSPB is represented at a meeting and RSPB is also representing LINK. I don't think that helps its profile. Also I'd be very happy to see more interchange with SNH on land use issues, either on a regular basis or topic-led."

"My knowledge on this organisation has been quite limited (to marine). I have been as helpful as possible, but do not have an overall view of the work of the organisation"

5. Findings from Interviews

Interviews were requested with 16 selected individuals who are key LINK target audiences and partners. Three individuals agreed to be interviewed (a response rate of 19%). The interviews were semi-structured and took between 20 and 40 minutes. The interviewees were given the assurance that their names would not be used associated with specific comments.

After an introductory question asking interviewees to describe a recent experience they had of contact with LINK, they were then asked the interviews then covered the following questions.

5.1 How useful has LINK been to the work you undertake?

LINK is very helpful in providing Committees with witnesses. LINK can be relied on to select the most appropriate person.

LINK questions are sometimes used by Committees when gathering evidence from witnesses.

LINK documents are provided to MSPs and their researchers.

Personal relationships with LINK are very useful and facilitate the sharing of ideas and information.

Observing Task Force discussions and attending Congress have been very helpful ways to make contact with the smaller LINK members who otherwise would be difficult to meet.

LINK bring in "real people" to talk about their work on the ground and this can be a very useful antidote to policy-focused discussions.

Useful as a conduit with a wide range of eNGOs. By coordinating views they "pull people into the debate" whose voices would normally not be heard.

5.2 Are there any documents produced by LINK that have been particularly useful to you?

LINK Amendment Scripts have been very useful.

LINK documents are "always really thoughtful, thought-provoking and well-written".

LINK documents are used "maybe more than LINK thinks."

None in particular but they are helpful and normally well written.

5.3 In your experience of contact with environmental NGOs, what value does LINK add to the individual voices of its member organisations?

Provides access to the right expertise is very valuable.

LINK can bring the weight of numbers of LINK members' memberships to a LINK view.

LINK brings "policy sanity" by ensuring that issues have been through a rigorous process of discussion before they emerge as a LINK view.

LINK has "a degree of gravitas" as a result of its experience in and with the Scottish Parliament.

LINK is "valued for its solutions" – it does not only raise problems.

Best illustrated by comparison with LINK England. Scottish Environment LINK manages to include the big players and make access easy to the small eNGOs.

Helpful for the overall robustness of the environment sector.

Conduit and coordination role.

Dissemination of information.

Platform for discussion.

5.4 How effective is LINK at achieving a common voice among its member bodies?

Achieving a common voice is one of LINK's "great strengths".

It is easy to recognise when there is no consensus.

It does this well and shows that there are some areas where there are common views and others where each member has its own view but this is not a problem. "We get it."

Does a fairly good job of this particularly through publications as a tangible output of LINK task forces.

5.5 Over recent years LINK has been actively engaged in advocacy in a number of environmental policy areas. What is your view of the contributions LINK has made to these policy debates?

Very high in both climate change and marine issues.

Because we are now in a different political world LINK needs to change the way it operates. LINK needs to become "fleeter of foot in dealing with a majority government with an independence agenda"

"Overall, very high quality and very organised."

5.6 What roles could LINK begin to play (or play more than at present) that would help it to make a greater contribution to good environmental governance in Scotland?

Influencing SEPA and SNH to play more of a role of representing the voice of Scotland's people on environment matters eg pursuing behaviour change on a national scale.

LINK could diversify its contacts on more "marginal" issues related to the environment such as health.

LINK's role depends on whether it wants to be seen as an organisation calling others to account or a conciliator. The danger of trying to do both is that it may be seen as schizophrenic. However, if LINK doesn't call others to account on environment issues, who else is there to take on this role? Would LINK's member organisations choose to do this?

LINK should work more on influencing the general public and not just focus on the policy process. However, LINK should take care to avoid being seen by the public as saying 'No' to everything.

LINK should become more "confident and bolder without hectoring" One way of doing this is to build relationships with people who are not "the usual suspects", for example the NFU. This kind of bridge building demonstrates a positive approach.

Keen to see LINK play more of a role in monitoring public bodies (for example the duties of local authorities under the Climate Change Act and concerning biodiversity). When shortcomings and failings are identified, LINK should provide guidance and advice to help fix the problems.

LINK should consider a more strategic approach to engaging with government and its agencies. It currently has a high level of access to the Minister and other high level individuals. LINK needs to consider how it should make best use of that access. By considering what key issues should be raised, at these meetings and how frequently they occur so that it can maintain goodwill and avoids meetings for meetings' sake.

5.7 Can you suggest 2-3 challenges facing the environment in Scotland in the next 3-4 years concerning which you think LINK could play a valuable contribution?

Climate change as it relates not just to Scotland but globally. Need to raise the issue of Scotland off-shoring the impact of its consumption.

Regulating the regulators – put pressure on SEPA and SNH to act more as champions for the environment

Enabling Parliament to better scrutinise the Scottish Government on sustainable development issues.

The environment sector is tending towards a lack of engagement with the general public.

The voice of the environment movement tends to have an English accent. There is a need to make a more 'Scottish' environment movement.

Politicians do not feel that the environment is high on the public agenda because of economic and political priorities. One of the key ways to get the attention of the politicians is through the public.

Risk of moving back to single issue land use. Need to focus on integration of economic and environmental uses of the land. The environment sector needs to stop viewing terminology like 'sustainable intensification' as a contradiction in terms and work out how to work with it.

Engaging with the business on policy initiatives.

How to deal with scarcer resources in an age of austerity.

CAP revisions.

Meeting the Climate Change targets by 2020.

6. Main Messages

From the questionnaire responses received and the comments made during the interviews, it is clear that LINK is viewed as an effective and valued voice on environmental issues in Scotland. Although it is not possible to accurately assess how representative the responses are of the 45 people who were invited to contribute, the response rate of 38%, the diversity and nature of the respondents, and the fact that respondents have used the 'Unable to comment/Don't know' option to opt out of answering when they had no opinion, suggest that these responses provide a reasonably reliable guide to the wider view of Scottish Environment LINK.

Messages from the questionnaire

The responses to **question 2** suggest that LINK does a very good job of keeping communication with respondents open in a range of ways. It is worth noting that informal contact is particularly valued by the interviewees and this may well be the case with questionnaire respondents too.

The responses to **question 3** suggest that LINK is seen as very successfully achieving its ambitions concerning scrutinising government and promoting debate about stronger environmental governance. This may need further strengthening given a majority government with many new members, a strong independence agenda and dealing with a recession.

The responses to **question 4** suggest that:

- LINK should consider taking a more challenging scrutiny role in its work and to broaden its audiences with more focus beyond policy-makers.
- The role of the general public in influencing decision-makers – particularly with a majority government – may need further consideration by LINK.
- LINK should consider taking more of a role in facilitating new forms of dialogue with and between parties that have opposing interests or are normally peripheral in policy debates.
- LINK should consider ways to become more strongly associated in the minds of its audiences with success stories and examples of effective collaboration ie a solution focus.

- LINK should continue its professional approach to providing evidence to support its views. However, agility and speed of response may, at times, be more important than marshalling detailed evidence.

The responses to **question 5** suggest that LINK's most widely recognised achievements have been in the areas of Marine Policy and Climate Change though respondents were very positive about the influence of LINK's contributions in general.

The responses to **question 6** suggest that LINK's documents are read primarily by specialist audiences. Those familiar with the documents were generally very positive about the contribution to understanding made by the documents and how informative they are. It is noteworthy that very few criticisms were made about lack of clarity or limited depth of research. LINK may wish to consider how they can broaden their audiences for their reports whilst not over-burdening the potential wider readership.

The responses to **question 7** demonstrate a high level of regard for LINK and its work. The statements that formed the core of this question (which were originally provided to support LINK's funding applications) were highly supportive of LINK so it is noteworthy that respondents expressed such a high level of agreement.

The responses to **question 8** demonstrate that the clarity and quality of LINK's contributions to policy development and progress towards Scotland's sustainable development are recognised and valued by respondents. Over 80% of respondents viewed both the clarity and the quality of LINK's contributions as high or very high. In none of the four categories did respondents score LINK's contribution as low or very low. Since only two respondents felt unable to comment this suggests an informed assessment by the respondents.

The responses to **question 9** suggest:

- Given the current economic and independence agendas, the environment has slipped down the political agenda. Maintaining and building public support is seen as essential.
- Making stronger connections with issues such as health and culture may be a valuable way of building the profile of (and public support for) the environment in the current political and economic climate.
- Marine issues are particularly important for Scotland and opportunities should be explored for building dialogue between diverse stakeholders.
- Renewables remains an important and sensitive topic, particularly with deadlines for tough emissions targets looming.
- CAP reform provides a key source of resources for conservation and access. The sector needs to be aware of the far-reaching implications that CAP reform will have.
- There is a need for new thinking to help policy-makers deal with new conceptual approaches to the environment such as ecosystem services.

The responses to **question 10** provide valuable food for thought concerning LINK's member profile. Whilst in the opinion of one respondent, there is a tendency for one of the LINK members to "dominate", this concern was not shared by the three interviewees. When asked about the potential problem of knowing which 'hat' was being worn by the LINK representatives at meetings, they reported that they were usually very clear and that the LINK representatives made a point of explaining this.

Messages from the interviews

With only three interviews it would be unwise to over-generalise from the responses, however the thoughtful responses from the three interviews are broadly consistent with the questionnaire responses and provide some valuable insights and ideas for LINK to consider.

The responses to **question 1** suggest that LINK is seen as very useful to the interviewees. The combination of both formal and informal contact are valued and LINK's wide range of members and contacts provide voices that may not otherwise be heard in policy discussions.

The responses to **question 2** suggest that LINK's documents are valued as helpful and well-written.

Noteworthy in the responses to **question 3** are the "gravitas" and "policy sanity" that LINK is seen to contribute. These are based on what are perceived as rigorous internal debates and disciplined systems for preparing LINK's views on issues.

The responses to **question 4** suggest that LINK is perceived as doing a good job in achieving a common voice on most issues. It is recognised that this is not possible on all issues and, elsewhere, it was suggested that acknowledging this diversity could be used more as a source of strength rather than a shortcoming.

The responses to **question 5** suggest that LINK's contribution through its advocacy role is well recognised but that the approach LINK takes to advocacy with a majority government needs to be different to that taken with a minority or coalition. This may require of LINK a different approach to its contributions to Parliamentary scrutiny of the Government's environmental record.

The responses to **question 6** provide some thought-provoking options for LINK's future roles. LINK's role in monitoring and calling public bodies to account was mentioned in a number of different contexts: with SEPA and SNH, with local authorities and with the Scottish Government. LINK's high level access is almost unique – is LINK making the most strategic use of that access? The potential for bridge-building and facilitating dialogue between different interests could be a role that LINK develops more in the future to become more associated with creative ways of working.

The responses to **question 7** suggests some important challenges in which LINK could play a role: greater engagement with the public and helping people recognise the longer term implications of shorter term economic decisions; and ensuring that the Government accounts for progress on sustainable development issues.

7. Appendix One: List of Contributors (Questionnaire and Interview)

Phil Alcock	Information and Communication Manager	Marine Scotland
Andrew Bachell	Director of Operations	Scottish Natural Heritage
Bob Christie	Outcomes Programme Manager	Improvement Service
Graeme Cook	Principal Researcher	SPICe
Jenny Dadd	Grants Manager	Esmee Fairbairn Foundation
George Eckton	Team Leader	COSLA
Rob Edwards	Environment Editor	Sunday Herald
Noel Fojut	Head of Policy and Legislation	Historic Scotland
Rob Gibson	MSP	Scottish Parliament
Gareth Heavisides	Biodiversity Strategy Team	Scottish Government
Jamie McGrigor	MSP	Scottish Parliament
David Mallon	Head of Marine Environment Team	Scottish Government
Andrew Midgley	Senior Policy Officer	Scottish Land and Estates
Clive Mitchell	Strategy Development	Scottish Natural Heritage
Grant Moir	Director of Conservation and Visitor Experience	Loch Lomond and Trossachs National Park Authority
Jo O'Hara	Head of Natural heritage Management	Scottish Government
Simon Pepper	Board Member	Scottish Natural Heritage
Peter Pitkin	Principal Adviser, Land Use	Scottish Natural Heritage
No details	-	-
No details	-	-