



LINK Board 6 October 2011, item 4.1

Draft Political Strategy Report

Autumn 2011

1. INTRODUCTION

Items where a decision of the Board and Network are requested ***will appear in bold italics***. The sections of this PSR have been slightly re-arranged in this Report to follow the different levels of government, and our involvement in the various branches at each level, more clearly.

2. ELECTIONS

2(a) European elections

The next European Parliament elections are to be held in June, 2014.

2(b) Westminster elections

The date of the Westminster General Election is in May, 2015 (subject to the Bill setting fixed five year terms being approved at Westminster this Autumn).

2(c) Holyrood elections

The next elections for Holyrood will be held in May, 2016.

2(d) Council elections

The next local council elections will be held on Thursday, 3rd May, 2012. The Local Governance Task Force has prepared a campaign plan and a manifesto for the elections will be launched in October, 2011. Other Task forces and Reps are encouraged to keep in touch with the network regarding any plans to be active around the local government elections.

2(e) LINK Rolling Manifesto

The Rolling Manifesto set out to cover all levels of our political activity and now consists of 35 sub-sections in 12 substantive policy areas. The manifesto is being refreshed this summer and autumn with particular attention to local government asks.

3. PARTY RELATIONSHIPS

3(a) Conservatives

The next Conservative conference is due in June 2012 - where we plan to host a fringe meeting on Governance Matters. Relationships with the Conservatives are reasonably cordial and cooperative at present. A meeting is being arranged with their new environment spokesperson. The party is in the midst of an election for a new leader.

3(b) Greens

The next Green conference is due in Autumn 2012, and a fringe meeting on Governance Matters is being arranged with Patrick Harvey MSP speaking. Relationships with the Greens are cordial and cooperative at present. A meeting is being arranged with their MSPs.

3(c) Labour

The next Labour conference is due in March 2012 - where we plan to host a fringe meeting on Governance Matters. Relationships with Labour are reasonably cordial and cooperative at present. A meeting is being arranged with their new environment spokesperson.

3(d) Liberal Democrats

The next Liberal Democrat one-day conference is due in November, but their main annual conference is due in March 2012 - where we plan to host a fringe meeting on Governance Matters. Relationships with the Liberal Democrats are reasonably cordial and cooperative at present. A meeting is being arranged with their new environment spokesperson.

3(e) Scottish Nationalists

The next SNP conference is due in October and a fringe meeting on Governance Matters has been arranged with Joan McAlpine MSP speaking. Relationships with the SNP are reasonably cordial and cooperative at present. The regular meetings with the relevant Ministers are being arranged.

4. SCOTTISH LOCAL GOVERNMENT LEVEL

Scotland's Councils face the electorate in May 2012, in a distinct election for the first time since devolution. LINK's SOA Task Force has been renamed the **Local Governance Task Force** and has decided to follow through on its work on Single Outcome Agreements and audit of local councils' environmental performance.

- **Election Campaign:** A campaign plan has been drawn up by the Task Force and circulated around the Network. A full manifesto is in preparation for a launch in late October. The campaign is designed to challenge the political parties to take full cognisance of the environmental issues and sustainable development in their election preparations – and to raise the profile of local environmental matters at a more local level throughout the period until May 2012.
- **Monitoring:** The Task Force plans to request a meeting with local government bodies and officials and Audit Scotland to discuss progress towards proper listing of the environmental powers and duties of local Councils – and monitoring of the implementation of key tasks.
- **Parliamentary Scrutiny:** A background briefing was prepared for the Holyrood Local Government and Regeneration Committee, and the Parliamentary Officer represented LINK and gave oral evidence to a roundtable meeting of the Committee as it gathered background information on 14th September, 2011.

Our growing expertise and involvement in local government matters has yet to provoke anything but a reasonably encouraging response from Councils and officials, but some antagonism to increased pressure on their allocation of budgets in a time of relative austerity may yet arise. Task Force plans for local election campaigning and hustings work have been noted by the Board.

5. SCOTTISH LEVEL

5(a) Legislative Issues

The First Minister presented his Legislative Programme to Parliament in a speech on Wednesday, 7th September, 2011. It contained 16 Bills and the following are of likely interest to LINK and its members.

- [Agricultural Holdings](#)
- [Budget](#)
- [Land Registration](#)
- [Water](#)
- [Legal Aid & Scottish Civil Justice Council](#)
- [Aquaculture & Fisheries](#)

It may be also that some have a broad interest in the Freedom of Information (Amendment) Bill.

Several items of legislation have been proposed to the parties by LINK members (with **Environmental Justice** being the thrust of considerable advocacy and the **Gill Review** the potential source of legislation – see above) but no major LINK campaign has been mounted with attention being transferred – as per recent PSR's – to the matter of proper scrutiny. (This issue is covered in the Governance paper circulated separately to this report). SEPA have invited LINK representatives to early discussion of legislation they think might be required to implement their **Better Regulation** agenda.

In a recent round of LINK meetings with parties' spokespeople, it was noted that the opposition parties appear to be unsure about how best to react to the SNP majority in relation to a number of issues and that there is concern around what appears to be rather a strong marshalling tendency afoot within SNP. LINK participants in the meetings were flagging LINK's governance, local government and economics areas as ones worth engaging with.

5(b) Administrative Issues

LINK Task Forces are engaged in post-election stakeholder engagements and monitoring of the intentions of the new, majority SNP Administration, based on their manifesto commitments. These were largely of a tentative nature in the field of the environment – and dominated overall by a continued overarching commitment to "sustainable economic development". The Programme for Government is, in the view of the Parliamentary Forum, "light in environmental substance". In particular receipt of monitoring and advocacy are, *inter alia*:

- Scottish input to reform of the **Common Agricultural & Fisheries Policies**;
- the Government's **zero waste plan**;
- the Scottish Government **Budget, Comprehensive Spending Review (CSR), National Performance Framework** and 'carbon accounting' of the spending priorities therein;
- whether the **Sustainable Land Use Strategy** can be improved by the addition of a stakeholders forum and pursuit of a good Action Plan by the end of 2011;
- the attitude of the new administration to **Climate Change** targets – both in respect of mitigation and adaptation;
- whether the new administration plans any **major restructuring** of the environmental agencies (although this looks increasingly unlikely), with a close eye to be kept on the **Forestry Commission** Scotland (following changes made in Wales);
- the will of the new Government to implement the **Marine Act** and
- the refresh by SNH of the **Biodiversity Strategy**.

After the LINK Seminar held on 30th August 2011, an **Economics Forum** has been established to marshal and sharpen our arguments for full sustainability, moving beyond GDP and to create an overarching advocacy strategy to pursue these objectives. Taken together with the principles laid down in our response to the 2010 Budget and our views on Preventative Spending, set out in our submission to the Christie Commission, these should create a new core for our approach to the Budget, CSR and all other economic matters. The Board have approved the provision of some support by staff to the new Economics Forum.

5(c) Infrastructure and Planning Issues

Several major planning decisions are in process and have been discussed by the Planning Task Force. The development agenda remains dominated by:

- energy issues – including new windfarms, fossil fuel and nuclear powered generation and on transmission lines;
- marine renewable energy development issues;
- major leisure developments – such as the golf resort at Menie Links;
- the review of permitted development rights – including the matters of hill tracks and micro energy generation, and
- transport issues – including the Forth Crossing, the Aberdeen Western Peripheral Route and a variety of road dualling schemes.

In the context of the continued development of terrestrial wind farms, the Landscape Task Force are developing proposals for the Board and Network to discuss means of directing government subsidies and incentives from terrestrial wind to newer, more efficient and less intrusive forms of renewables. The Board are prepared for further discussion of energy policy at a high level.

5(d) Judicial Issues

Access to justice in environmental matters, for relevant parties such as communities or eNGOs, remains prohibitively expensive in Scotland, although the award of Scotland's first Protective Costs Orders offers hope of gradual change. It is worth noting in this connection the recent decision of the European Court of Justice with regard to access to justice issues in the UK and Aarhus non-compliance. It is also worth noting that:

- the Gill Review in Scotland may lead to legislation allowing the opportunity to tackle this issue; and
- the SNP manifesto committed the Government to publicly consult of the possibility of establishing an environmental court.

The board has noted that current discussions round environmental justice might require further communication within LINK and that there may be a proposal coming forward for a small LINK grouping.

5(e) Civic Issues

LINK continues its involvement in SCVO and LINK members are widening the field of their co-operation with others in the Civic Sector (as within Stop Climate Chaos Scotland - SCCS). The LINK discussion paper Governance Matters will call for much wider alliances across civic Scotland in order to pursue the reform of governance. It also calls for reform within the civic sector itself and the pursuit of a Civic Forum. The draft paper has been outlined to SCVO, to whose own agenda the issues are very relevant.

5(f) Political Horizon

It was highly unlikely that the proportional electoral system for elections to the Holyrood Parliament would produce **a majority party** in the chamber – but with approximately 45% of votes cast for the SNP, that is what has happened. The opposition parties (as we must now definitively call them) were all weakened with, in particular, the reduction of the Liberal

Democrat representation to 5 MSPs. The LINK Network met to discuss this new political landscape on 3rd June, 2011, and the notes of the discussions are available on the Members' Section of the LINK website.

Amongst the principal directions laid down by the 3rd June Network meeting was that a series of legislative, administrative, judicial and civic governance issues are an underlying feature of Scottish politics. The meeting discussed the first draft of the paper **Governance Matters**, decided upon an effort to widen the debate across civic Scotland and prioritised items for LINK attention should the primary strategy fail to capture the attention of others within the policy community. The second draft of the paper has been circulated to the Network for comment.

6 UNITED KINGDOM LEVEL

The Conservative/Liberal Democrat Coalition Government in Westminster have entered a battle with conservationists on the issue of loosening **planning laws** in an attempt to kick start economic growth. This is similar political territory to their plans on selling off the **Forestry Commission Estate** and cutting the **National Wildlife Crime Unit** where they were forced to do u-turns. On the other hand, they continue to pursue **nuclear power** generation which has recently been given an additional £50m subsidy as a carbon neutral energy source - and an all-out approach to raising **Gross Domestic Product**. Oil prices are still at record levels in a market unsettled by events in Libya, Bahrain and across the Middle East. Meanwhile the legislative timetable continues until October's Queen's Speech, with, in particular, LINK members moving amendments in the debate over the **Energy Bill**.

The **Scotland Bill** continues to make its Westminster passage and is almost certain to pass, with new powers over the setting of income tax. LINK members briefed the Scottish Parliament Committee charged with scrutinising the Bill on our relatively minor concerns, particularly with reference to the need for the Scottish Parliament to take a swift decision about the future of hypothecation of aggregate or landfill taxes. The Parliamentary Forum discussed this matter and recommend that it be further discussed by the Board with a view to putting reaction plans in place as the Bill proceeds. The Board has approved a proposal that LINK should develop a broad view around Holyrood's fiscal powers in general and hypothecation in particular, and hope this might form one of the strands to be developed by the Economics Forum would. The list of six additional powers requested by the SNP Scottish Government after their election have all been rejected by the Coalition government, including the additional powers requested over corporation tax and the **Crown Estate**.

The Board supported Lloyd's proposal that LINK should develop a view around Holyrood fiscal powers and hypothecation and hoped this might form one of the strands which the Economics Forum would develop.

7. EUROPEAN AND INTERNATIONAL LEVELS

Issues of interest to LINK at present include the following.

- LINK members are following the developments in the **UN Climate Change** process following on from the Cancun COP/MOP meeting;
- There is considerable interest in the Rio De Janeiro conference in 2012 of the **Convention on Biological Diversity. (Rio+20)**. Current thinking amongst the organisations involved is to complement any Scottish Government input and to prepare a synthesis report, documenting what is good about Scottish performance with regard to

- the green economy and sustainable development, as well as on-going challenges linked to the themes of Rio, including governance, sustainable economics and poverty.
- LINK members are closely following the implementation of the **Marine Strategy Framework Directive** and the debate around the **Industrial Emissions Directive** (which has particular importance with regard to CO2 emissions).
 - Rumours have emerged in recent months from Brussels on the possibility of the commission introducing a draft Directives on **Sustainable Procurement** and **Non-Native Invasive Species**.
 - The EU **Common Fisheries Policy** is due for major reform in 2012 and consultations continue.
 - Discussions continue for the next major opportunity to change the EU **Common Agriculture Policy** in the 2014 EU budget.
 - **Iceland and Croatia** continue to pursue EU membership.
 - Financial weakness in the Western economies and turbulence in the world markets continues to cast shadows of protectionism across the globe, with the **Doha** WTO negotiations apparently in limbo. Fears are growing of a second recession in the US and the EU this winter – with a desperate search for methods to increase GDP at the centre of debate.
 - The Germans closure of seven **nuclear power** stations has become a major new factor in the debate about the nuclear industry's resurgence – and has been followed by decisions to abandon nuclear power or its development in Switzerland, Italy and Japan. This major narrowing of the market casts serious shadows over the British Government's hopes as they are adversely affected by fewer economies of scale open to the nuclear corporates.
 - **IUCN Regional Director for Europe**, Dr Hans Friederich, is coming to the **LINK Congress on 17th November** 2011 to hear the views of members on priorities for the IUCN Nature+ programme for 2013-16.

The Chief and Parliamentary Officers attended meetings in London with WCL and the Green Alliance on Tuesday 20th September 2011. The meetings discussed UK involvement in the European Environment Bureau (EEB) and how concerted efforts were required to improve communications to the members from UK level – and the ability of EEB members inside the UK to input to EEB discussions. Significant progress was made towards understanding the potential for LINK (together with WCL and other UK interests) to maximise inputs with small effort. Some further engagement with Green Alliance in London will be important in establishing an agreed way of working, in addition to continued engagement in the EEB AGM in Brussels. The board have agreed to the investment of staff time in discussions with the Links and Green Alliance around use of and input to EEB.

Jonathan Hughes has undertaken the drafting of a paper to circulate to members in advance of Congress on the Scottish synthesis report for the Rio+20 Earth Summit and reasons for LINK to engage and support this Scottish level initiative.

8. CONCLUSION

This PSR contains fewer questions than earlier iterations. Many important areas are covered, however, and large strategic issues are discussed