Internal LINK note

Main points, LINK / Bob Macintosh discussion, Silvan House 11 May 2012

Attending *SG Envt & Forestry Directorate - Bob Macintosh*
LINK - Deborah Long, Lloyd Austin, Helen Todd, Jen Anderson

DL thanked BM for meeting, indicating LINK's round of strategic liaison with Parks, agencies and others, to see where things are at, get a feel for where critical / supportive voice may be needed.

JA gave brief introduction to LINK mission, membership, structure, operations, strategic objectives.

BM, recently into new role, was getting up to speed on his new divisions and responsibilities: Natural Resources Div (parks, agriculture, biodiversity) and RESAS (JHInstitute, RBotanicGE, analytical capability for rural), Environmental Quality Division (pollution, water, air quality, nuclear) and FCS. BM technically heads up FCS though has delegated a lot to David H Howat.

DL outlined current priorities for LINK including: governance and GMatters, the broad delivery of environmental commitments and objectives, transparency, independence of NDPBs. How did BM see himself engaging in this? BM saw roles in challenging the 'silo' approach, and trying to embed environmental indicators in the sustainable economic growth priority.

DL moved on to traditional measures of growth, and LINK's current work to promote additions to run alongside GDP, as a contribution to the current debate. BM felt there is a need for an even stronger environment lobby rather than what he feels is a 'general feeling of a sense of all being well'. LINK indicated that we are not always supportive of the direction of policy and decisions, though wish to support where appropriate. BM using CAP as an example felt the NFUS is a particularly strong voice. LA explained the NGOs have made some progress on this, but are up against it unless politicians recognise that these organisations represent a legitimate community of people who want to see progress, rather than abstract voices compared with other lobbies with more political weight.

BM noted Agencies are less independent, getting closer to Ministers (as they will be held responsible if things go wrong); this means the balance between advice and delivery and regulation is quite difficult. LINK flagged its GM report which makes the case for clearer distinction between these roles. BM saw pros to both approaches and referred to the general desire for a slimmed public sector, and the push to draw agencies further in and ensure they focus on key priorities (licensing for example pushed further out). He reported a loss of 1000 staff with a further 20% cut in staff planned for the three years ahead – a steep curve of loss. He stressed that SG would like input on how to make sure priorities were delivered and invited views. He felt the current Wales single agency process should be avoided – it is better for Scotland to identify what is needed here and how best to structure things around that; on this there is a degree of debate afoot with tension between the bodies involved.

LINK outlined its plans for its referendum challenge (event in June tying in governance issues with a challenge to the political campaigns), neutral in relation to political choices, but robust in relation to governance needs.

Acknowledging our interest in LUS, BM cautioned LINK to go slowly on advocacy as next stage relates to spatial planning, a key milestone, traditionally the realm of the planners; encouragement rather than supplanting, advisable. He saw CAP and water and other areas going in the LUS direction and felt things should all come together at some scale, but the who / how to bring it together is a challenge. Discussions due to start June;this is big and complex, Scotland should get there, 5 year time frame; we may see pilots first. Re stakeholder group (LINK had pressed for LUS group) the problem is the servicing of these. BM had suggested to Sally Thomas (SG) to include a couple of (LINK?) contributors on the steering group, as an alt. to a new forum. **Action - ST**

HT outlined ramblers concerns re access to forest estate, not just to do with current inability for the FC to close core paths under the Land Reform Act, which an amendment to legislation should address. HT advised that there is a lack of consistency and communication (with both recreation users and access authorities) regarding closures to paths and an attitude which is often not seen as being proactively encouraging of recreation. HT pointed out that public trust is damaged if management measures are not seen as reasonable. BM hoped this was not happening; fatalities had pushed them but he hoped a proactive approach was still being taken to recreation; BM invited examples, also advising a meeting with FE (S Hodge)– **Actions HT**

DL felt biodiversity review group discussions were going well. BM quite pleased, encouraging team to share more in advance of meetings, indicated AThin fine with finished report which would go to Cabinet for sign-off then out for public consultation soon. DL flagged LINK 26/6 event to celebrate wildlife and keep it on MSPs' radar. BM suggested involving Society of Wildlife Artists. **Action - DL**

LA voiced LINK support for WEWS and FRM Acts though concern around their delivery, in terms of prosecutions of breaches. LINK would make bigger noise to support government to be more robust via SRPID, DEPAS and other routes. LINK was engaged on the various groups. BM noted that SG supports a more risk-based approach: LINK could support that if there is touch action where action is due, ie redirecting rather than reducing action. BM noted that money/spending review was driving the need, and indicated the intention was indeed for a greater focus on crime.

WRT proactive work, NPF2 and WFD, LA noted the LUS has the right approach but wondered how this could be translated into action eg in partnerships between LAs, NGOs, to give momentum. BM replied that this had a lot to do with funding, mainly SRDP, with questions around size of this pot, when the protracted process would conclude. He would like to see more delivery mechanism a la Defra, but saw no way other than taking money out of SRDP or somehow growing the funding resource. LA suggested that HLF, BLF could be influenced to give support to NGOs, companies and other organisations which come up with strong proposals for delivery on the ground. BM mentioned LIFE development ahead, the value of that fund, suggesting we take full advantage there.

[**Possible** a**ction for LINK: convene a meeting between various and reps of these funds?]**

Winding up the discussion DL indicated LINK is keen to maintain contact; the ministerial meetings with G6 and LINK were noted, including LINK's plan to prepare better and use harder – BM agreed these should not be a chat or easy ride for the Minister. In response to our offer of more information and or contact BM reiterated his desire to see us push hard on CAP, to get bigger political momentum based on awareness of wider public interest.

[**this links to where we go with aspiration to make environmental narrative more robust**]

Draft/JA/June 2012

Inc HT comments