

## SNH AND LINK ANNUAL LIAISON MEETING 2007

31 October 2007, 10.00 am SNH office, Hope Terrace

### Present

Andrew Thin	SNH Chairman
Ian Jardine	SNH Chief Executive
Karen Wright	SNH Head of Government
John Mayhew	LINK Chair
Deborah Long	LINK Vice-Chair
Eilidh Macpherson	LINK Parliamentary Officer

### INTRODUCTION BY LINK

JHM gave a recap on how LINK functions, including the roles of the Board and Honorary Officers plus John's continuing role as Chair in the light of developments at NTS.

### INTRODUCTION BY SNH

AT said he thought LINK's credibility was severely weakened by the lack of significant financial support from its member bodies. We stressed that not only did members contribute a significant proportion of their income to LINK but that they also committed a significant amount of staff time and expertise and that members were committed to increasing their subscriptions by more than inflation so that 50% of core LINK costs were covered by subs. AT thought we should revisit this especially in the light of tight public spending.

## 1. UPDATE ON LINK'S CORPORATE STRATEGY 2006-09

### Evaluation and review

DJL went through the evaluation procedures LINK has put in place, including Task Force planning and reporting mechanisms and twice-yearly planning and review meetings, which seemed to go down well. We asked if there was any expertise within SNH that we could draw on and IJ suggested Andy Dorin. However, the review of the SNH Corporate Strategy is in progress and under a new process so Andy was likely to be busy until after December.

DJL also outlined new plans for Board level evaluation. They agreed that KPIs were essential and AT suggested a couple:

- % of member support to LINK's budget (in terms of cash and time).
- Survey of stakeholder opinion, including members, of value of LINK, to illustrate the value of LINK progressing issues as opposed to members progressing them alone.

## **Opportunities, challenges ahead for the environment; potential for greater mutual support**

### **Biodiversity – widening roles**

DJL outlined the current upheavals at UK and Scottish levels and stressed that LINK was keen to support SNH in its work to review the current delivery of biodiversity conservation in Scotland as well as work with SNH on informing the UK process. IJ said that Ministers were very keen on biodiversity targets and that in the next spending review, biodiversity was expected to be a priority.

However both AT and IJ stressed that the complexity of the process is politically unsellable. The current political buttons for SNH are:

- Species Action Framework
- Designated sites
- Maintaining and increasing public support
- Building on national pride in biodiversity

The old principles of biodiversity conservation (plans and processes) are out of sync with political wishes. Both stressed that only a positive approach would reap benefits as political support remains fragile. Ministers want to build on the strong and positive support for Scotland's biodiversity. Any response to the current report could be strong but positive perhaps? IJ agreed that targets, even if ambitious, are still welcomed by Ministers but that being negative about progress to date would be increasingly counterproductive.

AT stressed that, in his view, a crucial role for LINK was in providing leadership that should keep a united front and a positive outlook.

### **Flooding legislation**

JHM presented the brief which had been provided by Andrea Johnstonova on behalf of the Freshwater Task Force. AT confirmed that SNH fully understood this issue and supported our line.

However, IJ confirmed that while flooding was a key priority for SNH, it would continue to maintain a background role and the SNH view would increasingly be combined with that of SEPA and publicly would be seen to come from SEPA – despite their varying statutory responsibilities for this subject. This is part of the Keeping it Simple/Single Environment and Rural Service (SEARS) approach. SNH is, however, committed to driving the sustainable flood management issue forward, ensuring that the current checks and balances in the system were rationalized yet remained in place to protect natural heritage interests.

A valuable role for LINK will be in providing real evidence of sustainable flood management where it has been successfully used elsewhere in the world, including for example where catchment area management is making a difference. It would be valuable to maintain close contacts with SEPA which is the lead agency while ensuring that SNH is aware of LINK views and continues to push for environmental checks through SEPA.

### **Influencing behaviour change with climate change– emerging agenda**

JHM gave a brief outline of the work Simon Pepper is doing in bringing together a wide range of organisations all working on climate change. In SNH, Colin Galbraith leads on climate change with Martin Gaywood. SNH is focusing on adaptation rather than mitigation. It is looking at research on predicting changes in biodiversity and habitats and implications of these changes. IJ stressed that they are keen to work with LINK on assessing the role of protected areas in the context of climate change, the protected areas as carbon sinks, a new role and demonstrating alternative values.

## SNH CORPORATE STRATEGY AND FUTURE PRIORITIES

*Keeping it Simple; implications for environmental objectives.*

**Financial settlement for SNH - contingency plans and priorities.**

AT ran through the emerging SNH Corporate Strategy. Its main push is to demonstrate the value of natural heritage to Scotland and its people. It will be ready for consultation in January. See MSP leaflet from earlier this year for the four main themes. The argument about the resonance of biodiversity with single mothers etc was reiterated and AT thought it was important to raise the profile of biodiversity with respect to the economy, eg the environment attracting and retaining skills. He used the Moray Firth economic boom as an example of this.

### SNH Corporate strategy main themes

Regional and national economic priorities

Adapting to climate change. The role of adaptation is key for SNH.

Well being – physical and mental. Also stressed environmental justice and young people's health.

Biodiversity: relevance to the national profile, self esteem and pride. Using Scotland's biodiversity to engender political support to work towards the best management of the best biodiversity in western Europe.

Decluttering and streamlining: avoiding duplication.

Relationships and communications: the strategic review has tasked SNH with constructing bridges outwith the usual conservation audiences and across wider interest groups including both public and private sectors. This chimed with Fred's thoughts on working with wider civil society.

SNH is also looking to be able to provide leadership in the public arena more generally within the next 2 years. AT stressed again the importance of LINK having a leadership role at national level.

### Keeping it Simple

New government's key themes:

1. Localism

2. Over-complexity of the public sector, partly because it has grown up to mirror that in England – other small countries do things a different way and there may be more appropriate models for Scotland to follow. Government feels that innovation and development in Scotland is too difficult because there are too many players involved. If decluttering cannot be achieved there is a danger of frustration within government which could then start to sweep away all the checks and balances, some of which we may think are vital.

SNH is therefore taking a very positive outlook on the Keeping it Simple initiative. While the quango bonfire remains in the SNP manifesto commitments, there is no immediate pressure and Ministers may walk away from it at a later date, given that they also have issues as a minority government and the very tight spending review.

However, SNH is keen to make it work if it can. The agency statement outlines the SEARS proposal, which aims to increase efficiencies by reducing overlaps, sharing services, sharing delivery and removing the perception of duplication.

By June 2008, the nine agencies involved need to have demonstrated a single rural service. Ministers have approved the basic outline and agencies have gained Ministerial trust to deliver the outcomes agreed. SNH stressed they were keen to streamline without losing efficiency. AT thought that may have been a SG press release on this agreement after the joint meeting in September?

The clear messages were the importance of natural heritage and national pride

Increasing delivery and increasing efficiency. If LINK wanted to make a statement on this issues, it would be important for LINK to clarify its message and identify the positives of streamlining without being less effective for the environment and with the caveat that mistakes must not be made. There was thought to be no need for such a statement at the moment.

January 2008 – announcement expected from Ministers.

### **Spending review**

14 November is date for expected spending review announcement. It should be possible to identify the SNH budget in Tier 3. They are expecting a tight budget and a good outcome would be a level cash agreement, ie a small cut in real terms. They are expecting to see the site condition target retained, along with the biodiversity target and efficiency targets. The priorities therefore remain the same although there is likely to be a real drop in funding. There are also discussions about local vs regional funding and SNH may lose some of the funding it currently allocates to local authorities.

## **2. MAKING THE CONNECTIONS - SOCIAL AND ECONOMIC BENEFITS OF THE ENVIRONMENT**

JHM briefed SNH on the current LINK project. We all agreed that communications between LINK and SNH must continue. SNH were particularly keen to see from LINK statistical and case study evidence of valuing natural heritage, eg Californian study that identified how the environment is driving high economic growth.

IJ also asked what the LINK view might be on the changing land use issues, eg the loss of sheep farming, is that good or bad; the implementation of SRDP – how do we judge its success? Ministers are wanting to put funding into cattle – is this good or bad? This is the sort of thinking that will be going on over the next 6 months.

Marine: SNH is keen for LINK support for Marine Protected Areas. They would like to see a consistent level of advice from LINK and case studies from around the world that illustrate the value of protected areas and their benefits that run wider than conservation, particularly proven benefits to fisheries.

## **4. BRIEF OVERVIEW OF LINK'S PERFORMANCE AGAINST GRANT COMMITMENTS**

See evaluation discussion above. It was noted that KW would be having a separate meeting with LINK staff on this issue.

## 5. LIAISON WITH PARLIAMENT AND THE NEW SCOTTISH GOVERNMENT

EM introduced the role of the parliamentary team at LINK, how the team supports the member organisations, and the main upcoming priorities for the next year. JHM summarised the issues over Ministerial liaison regarding LINK and the 'G6' grouping.

IJ suggested that it would be valuable to LINK to develop close and informal relations with Ministers to increase influence. Characters like Fred are also very valuable to LINK.

EM gave a brief introduction to SEW and the proposed theme for 2008. SNH had liked SEW 2007 and thought the health theme had worked very well. AT was impressed that Patricia Ferguson was involved and enthusiastic. They weren't very keen on the proposed 'sustainable livelihoods' theme for SEW 2008 and thought we should revisit this, if even just to reword it so people knew what we were talking about.

AT would like to meet the new President, when elected. JHM explained the process we were following to seek a new President and what a challenge this was proving. AT said he didn't receive a copy of 'Scotland 2011' and suggested that both he and Ian should be added to mailing lists.

We agreed to annual meetings at this level, with LINK bringing to the table the current priorities as we see them.

Action: letter to AT and IJ thanking them for their time, along with summary of the 2020 project. I think this would inspire them and reassure them that we are acting efficiently as a network and communicating effectively with other organisations and networks.

Deborah Long, 1 November 2007

with additional input from John Mayhew and  
Eilidh Macpherson, 5 November 2007