

Meeting with SNH, 22 Feb 2013

Grant-driven catch-up discussion, involving Andrew Bachell and Ian Bray for SNH, Deborah Long and Jen Anderson and Alice Walsh for LINK

1. LINK strategic direction – medium to long term changes

DL outlined LINK approach to potentially tougher funding environment starting with establishment of a Board response team to keep an eye from 2010, then recent business structure remodelling by Board, keeping financial scenarios (in which she indicated LINK's worst case is for "a 20% decline in government funding"), aiming to flat-line spending over the years to 2016/17 if necessary and slightly reduce in line with income, regularly reviewing priorities with members, now investing more core staff time in fundraising (with new FR consultant on Board), raising the percentage membership income gives to essential spend toward 60% from 50%, continuing to make the case for central government to commit to funding the civic and intermediary roles LINK plays, working on a smaller core staff complement (3.75FTE), looking to package work more as fundable, ensure FCR, and develop business income through sponsorship and possibly a business affiliation. Relying more than ever on the voluntary effort invested by members (for every £1 invested in LINK, the network returns almost £2).

SNH thanked DL for helpful picture of where LINK is aiming to go and asked:

What were MB attitudes to subs rises and funding prognosis? – We reported supportive to date
Were their KPIs affected? – We reported not. We noted LINK's outcome (impact) KPIs in the new strategy with reporting arrangements that would involve TFs as well as staff and trustees.

Action – Copy LINK CS to Ian Bray

2. LINK TFs – emerging issues and task force performance

LINK reported on a range of TF work & Convenor feedback on the relationships, generally good.

3. SNH priorities

New Board Members BMs (3) – names to be with Minister end March; advert listed expertise in Local government, Science and ?Marine. SNH may elect a new Depute Chair (differences between C and VC noted) though not necessarily during the months ahead. New Chair appointed by Govt for Feb 2014 with recruitment starting in the autumn. AB thought this would be an external appt.

Strategic review

– SNH are in Y1 of new strategy but a mini review is anticipated because Scotland's books don't balance. Their (and others) budget may change from that expected; currently expect 4.5%, then 4% reductions. Indications are that 2015/16 (first year of next CSR) be a very difficult year, significantly worse than currently, even if things were to pick up beyond that.

- Natural environment directorate review – afoot now driven by the forestry issue but looking at SNH, SEPA, Parks, forestry and a couple of other bodies that are impacted, led by Bob Macintosh, and one aim is to save Government 15% spend. SNH would see inclusion of Agric/SRPID as sensible though that is not happening and neither is any coverage of HS's relationship to natural environment, or that of other relevant orgs. AB did not feel that the review would result in the Agencies being drawn closer in to Government.

- SNH have lost 150 of 850 jobs in 3 years in losses or non-renewables, as part of SG's wider aim to lose 25% of jobs by a target date. SNH now looking at options for shared services and offices (Great Glen House belongs to the Agency).

Improvement projects:

Information management systems which put a burden on the Agency - looking at making data publicly available immediately

What to do with assets (land which is not NNR) – selling/passing into trust ownership

Bringing staffing down, esp since there is a 1% pay rise for the first time this year in three years, and possibly next year too. However pressure for staffing to rise in relation to some areas (eg marine) needs managed too. Boundaries between programmes may blur as the staff resource is allocated across the work areas.

Working more, externally – CPPs are obvious case in point, where a lot of effort focussed. Danger for environment is that it is only mentioned in relation to health in the SOA guidance, rather than per se; SNH is pushing certain topics in the direction of CPPs. SNH's other work eg LUS pilots can be used to feed in to the SOA process too. A Thin is on Govt's high-level overview body for SOAs, also, though not in capacity as SNH chair.

Local delivery of service – licensing functions have been reviewed and are being delivered with a lighter touch, however that may strike observers. SNH plans to deliver grants too with a lighter touch and through a different mechanism than the current web-based applications. Are piloting new approach - frameworks, outcomes focussed, in relation to what SNH want delivered – with a few organisations now; will become more discussions-based in response to bids, with agreements by letter. LINK's is already moving in that direction.

Top priorities over last few months:

Favourable condition of sites – have never hit target of 95% since 2004, so the new target is simply to get numbers up, with the emphasis on what kind of effort will be effective. With less SRDP £s ahead, and reliance on voluntary mechanisms to get landowners to sign up to management regimes which are becoming unaffordable for SNH to oversee, the future is hard; Agency may have to get into partnerships, apply compulsory orders – (SNH Chair not averse to latter, but keen that the Board is sure any such cases are rock solid and ducks are in a row). **Questions on deer from LINK – please put concerns in writing and request meeting with Andrew Bachell.**

MPAs consultation this year, Marine Scotland led, but with local work by SNH

Renewables on and off shore to meet Scottish targets but reflect various interests, landscape primarily.

SBS a high priority, with SNH working on natural capital assets and alternative measures of economic performance to reflect the natural heritage. Some sign that SG recognises and could support this in relation to 'wonderful Scotland' tourism needs.

SRDP – lot of work behind scenes

SCGN and strategic routes as SNH proposals for NPPF3. Did not call for a national ecological network.

Planning – the 'object' issue; have some confidence their advice is being taken on board, also by Reporters. LINK's plans to input on SPP welcomed.

Responding to a mood within Scottish Government and invitation to SNH for landscape ideas; SNH may pick up on LUS and ecological services, etc. AB has updated LINK LTF.

MPAs – 3 scenarios being discussed. Minister's recent commitment in reply to PQ that management regimes will be discussed with communities ahead of the consultation may suggest different timescale for consultation, AB wondered. Dominic Counsell off on longterm sick leave; SNH will shortly put in place an alternative arrangement.

YONS – at its more or less half way point.

4. Support from SNH post 2014

Funding is difficult and SNH will be pushing to reduce its funding of others and/or get more for that. If fundees are introducing any new elements ask whether SNH is the right first port of call.

LINK asked re: marine funding (since future project funding will no longer be 100%, and marine is currently outwith scope of grant): to which SNH advised LINK to make the case for funding, looking at SNH and MS outcomes in terms of conservation and marine planning, and seek SNH support for a dialogue with Marine Scotland. Specifically marine planning and ensuring widest stakeholder engagement in local plans – getting the NGOs there, for example. **MTF to discuss**

SNH asked how members are coping with the funding situation – we reported generally okay so far with some specific ups and downs. SNH wondered if the age of typical givers is a concern – we thought generally not, as NGOs plan for young interest, then a period of silence, followed by a return to giving by the older person.

SNH also asking (at various levels it appears including AB) “where are the NGO campaigns when they are needed”. We expressed surprise, given the wide range of agenda and effort on modest funds within LINK, and suggested greater contact between SNH and LINK for regular exchange about work and progress. See below.

5. Future liaison

We agreed to:

- Maintain the current irregular informal Chair-CEO contact (DL/IJ)
- Set up opportunities for SNH senior staff & BMs to liaise with the network for an understanding of strategic thinking on issues and priorities. **A network meeting, poss August, tba, through AB.**
- Organise an autumn 2013 discussion looking at the period beyond March 2014 when current grant ends at what LINK will deliver in following years. **Date to be agreed.**
- Encourage members to consider attending SNH board meetings according to agenda relevance, to demonstrate stakeholder interest in the way in which issues are discussed by the SNH Board. **To members at networking and via bulletin**