

## **INTERNAL PAPER    Report on LINK member survey 2012**

The member survey ran from early December 2011 to February 2012.

Its outcomes, together with an assessment of external perceptions of LINK's role and impact, will inform a refresh of LINK's corporate strategy for the years 2012 to 2015.

In total, (from a membership of 35 organisations) 27 questionnaires were returned during the member survey; one was completed on behalf of 2 bodies, and for WTS 2 people filled out separate questionnaires.

### **QUESTIONS ABOUT MEMBERS & RESPONDENTS' STATUS**

**Member organisations which responded:** APRS, ArchScot, Buglife, ButterflyCS, FOES, Froglife, HWDT, JMT, LivSts, MCS, MCoS, NTS, PLife, RAS, RSPB, ScotBadgers, SCRA, SCNP, SWLG & CC, SWT, SoilAS, WWT, WDCS, WTS, WWFS.

**Status of respondents:** 42% had consulted with colleagues before answering. 77% were main reps for their organisation. 33% were board members of LINK, 22% were TF convenors or deputies, 33% were TF members and 11% acted as a delegate for LINK. Most were familiar with LINK and its processes through their engagement.

### **REFLECTION OF COMMENTS**

Comments made in the survey are reported below unattributed to specific organisations.

Occasionally comments are summarised, where this has been simple, or are listed to give a complete picture of feedback.

Otherwise, please assume that each individual paragraph of comment is from one organisation.

Where people said they did not feel qualified to comment, or did not know, these have not usually been included.

### **QUESTIONS ON STRATEGY AND IMPACT**

**Q.5. What does your organisation consider to be LINK's three most important achievements over the last three years?**

22 responses

Marine work mentioned most (12) including production of report on Avoiding Conflict in the Marine Environment; also Land Use Strategy work (7), SOA/Local government (4), and Climate Act (3).

6 respondents mentioned LINK's work on Governance, a couple mentioned Economics. Others were more generic, citing input to legislation more generally, representation of views of sector and proactive positioning with government and other audiences. Also mentioned were: building consensus, strength of voice, better political horizon scanning, manifesto work, vibrant taskforces; and topics important to individual members and taken forward through LINK, such as CNPA meeting on housing, access to justice, hill tracks, invasive species through WANE bill.

**Q.6. In the last three years, how successful has LINK been in achieving its strategic objectives of:**

Answer Options	Unsuccessful	Somewhat successful	Successful
A sustainable Scotland	6	18	1
Being a strong voice for the environment	1	9	15
Acting as an efficient and accountable network	1	5	19

25 responses.

Comments:

We could always do better, especially if better resourced.

Very concerned about the lack of environmental protection in Scot; lack of consideration for landscape issues; lack of understanding amongst decision-makers about what sustainability is. Crucially, we are concerned about the apparent perception - encouraged perhaps by events such as SEW where "celebrating Scotland's environment" is key aim - amongst policymakers that the environmental sector is more than happy with ScotGovt's direction of travel. From our perspective, LINK has not taken on some of the key hard issues and it's individual orgs or coalitions which have - e.g. Cairngorms NPA Local Plan challenge; landscape threat from large-scale wind. We understand the reasons - generally it is said to be because not all LINK organisations are in agreement. However, there are other occasions when LINK puts considerable resources into lobbying, so the appearance to policymakers is that it is on behalf of all of LINK - e.g. marine work; climate change interaction.

None of us have been terribly successful in achieving these objectives, but we've had our moments!

LINK has been less successful with the current administration in promoting sustainable actions. This is partly related to the economic return but also reflects a less sympathetic view of the environment and an intense focus on economic growth as the solution to all ills. The ecosystem approach and the gradual development of a Land Use Strategy do offer some hope of improvement in the future.

We play too nicely and consequently fail to maximise our political/parliamentary impact.

Despite the not inconsiderable achievements, including some progressive legislation passed, it is hard to argue that over this period Scotland has become more committed to pursuing a genuinely environmentally sustainable future. Too much of the public and political focus in relation to the environment has been on climate change, important though that is, and too little on re-casting society's whole value system. From our standpoint too little weight has been given to the factors which contribute to people's quality of life, rather than simply their ability to survive. In this sort of context, combatting climate change can itself become an almost utilitarian endeavour, rather than a matter of humankind rethinking its whole relationship with the rest of nature. Clearly the responsibility for failing to transform a whole culture can hardly fall on the voluntary sector but it is unfortunate that LINK has not had greater success in countering the tendency in recent years (even before the recession) to lay even more emphasis on material measures of well-being and on the economic success, conventionally assessed, which contributes to such prosperity.

Scotland could only be considered sustainable with e.g. a more progressive National Performance Framework, coherent policies on transport and climate change and proper protection and recovery of our marine environment, but LINK has successfully pushed the Government in the right direction.

In terms of LINK operations, my experience is that it acts as a strong voice for the environment with thoroughly considered policies and well-argued advocacy, based on sound science, including the precautionary principle. I am always impressed by the breadth, depth and transparency of LINK work and find it to be both efficient and accountable.

I think it is difficult for LINK as an organisation to judge how it achieves 'a sustainable Scotland' directly. That is not to say it is a bad strategic objective but it is difficult to claim success at it.

I think we can always be a stronger voice for the environment and we can still be too conservative in our challenges to government.

I feel the network is running well.

We do not feel that LINK provides an inclusive approach which takes all aspects of the environment into account.

Andy Myles has been successfully lifting our efforts to an even more strategic level including effective contacts with other parts of the third sector.

**Q.7. Do you support the view of LINK's Board and recent Strategic Planning that these should remain LINK's strategic objectives to 2015?**

27 responded.

96% agree (1 was explicit on definition of sustainable as that signed up to by all UK administrations). 4% (1 member) disagrees, saying "We find it impossible to support a strategy which does not discriminate between renewable energy development locations and does not refer to the conservation of wild and upland landscape."

**Q.8. Are there any significant opportunities for influence that the LINK network has missed since Spring 2009?**

22 responded. Yes 27%. No 73%.

Comments were:

What has SNP adopted from the LINK manifesto and what they have pledged to do?

There are always lost opportunities but this is not a reflection on LINK failures so much as capacity limits.

Need to think more strategically about the opportunities for influence afforded by legislation /consultations etc.

With the huge turnover of MSPs at the last election, major job to be done in trying to raise the general level of environmental awareness in their ranks. I don't feel that collectively (extends well beyond LINK) we have really risen to the challenge.

Transport.

No. Less clear what LINK's ambitions as a network are at UK (or EU) level. It is possible that future opportunities for influence may come at a UK or EU level but we would need to be monitoring these which is a challenge for resources. The situation complicated by fact that member orgs may be part of UK-level or international parent orgs who would be the natural lead for these members on UK or EU-level issues. A case in point would be the Office for National Statistics review of indicators on well-being, which complements our interest in the GDP+ agenda. This discussion will help set the course for future UK data collection and analysis and is therefore of interest to all UK environmental orgs. However, we have not as a group injected ourselves into this discussion.

Potentially engaging early/proactively with more of a campaign focus in run up to elections?

We have made good progress in our parliamentary office which is providing us with a better return for investment.

Not a criticism of LINK, but SNH still appears to remain apart from us, and an unaccountable body.

Engaging with government in the debate concerning renewable energy development costs and locations.

**Q.9. What three challenges for the environment does your organisation plan to address in the next three years?**

The following areas were mentioned, some more than once, as bracketed numbers show:

Climate change and adaptation - helping to mitigate impacts on food and farming and communities  
CNPA building large housing estates in the National Park

Loss of biodiversity

Counter current rate of attrition of wild land - quantity and quality

Access to Environmental Justice and Aarhus Compliance

Threats to heritage protection & support at local & central government

Habitat fragmentation and loss (x2)

Halting the loss of plant diversity

Countering the current tendency for the existing national parks to give too much weight to short-term economic benefits to park residents relative to the interests of the environment and the long-term well-being of everyone with a stake in the parks, which includes very many people living outside them and who may never even visit them.

Pavement parking

Marine Protected Areas (x 2) and special areas of conservation

Protection and recovery of the marine environment with a network of marine protected areas that really work and a marine planning system for which the purpose is achieving Good Environmental Status and protecting and enhancing our seas.

Promoting the work of Countryside Rangers and other front line staff as key interpreters and managers of the natural environment

Inappropriate development

Local authority intransigence! Encouraging them to meet their obligations re provision of allotments

Delivering/implementation of necessary measures to realise climate act goals and targets

The threat to achieving woodland creation targets.

By considering a wider agenda than just badgers, and being more involved in wider biodiversity issues

Developments in the upland landscape particularly wind power generation

Making the case for a strategy for future National Parks in Scotland

Climate Change (x 2)

Increased area of native woodland

Health & well-being - putting more healthy & sustainable food on the public plate

Wind farms on wild land

Energy

Continue to make the case for increased statutory protection of wild land before policymakers

Promoting Scotland's renewable energy future and fighting fossil fuel developments

CAP/SRDP

Biodiversity loss (x 2)

Converting into wider practice the application of sustainable land management practices

Drumming up support for a planned expansion of the suite of national parks across Scotland.

Walking to school

Ensuring Marine Bill delivers environmental objectives

Improving the sustainability of fishing practices through reform of the Common Fishing Policy and integrating fisheries management with the new marine planning system

Promoting schemes that engage with young people to encourage active participation in environmental activities

Marine renewable energy

Planning barriers - planning requirements for allotments are not clear and differ widely throughout Scotland

Scotland is a strong voice for CFP reform/progressive fisheries management

The potential break-up of the Forestry Commission

By being more involved in the whole Planning agenda

Influencing local authority development plans to include positive landscape protection policies

Pressures from development

Protection of woods and trees of high value for conservation

Sustainable farming & food - persuading all stakeholder that 'business as usual' is not an option

Too many deer for natural regeneration

Economic orthodoxy - primacy of GDP and primary/other industries in decision making

Increase public awareness of both the threats to and the benefits of wild land and wild places

Challenging Scottish corporate financing of and activity in unethical / environmentally damaging activities

Community empowerment to protect & value Scotland's Heritage

Integration of biodiversity/healthy ecosystems in policy making

Building political support for wildlife and native habitats in Scotland

Securing recognition of the part that National Parks can play in charting a path towards a more truly sustainable future, by acting as test-beds for new approaches (for example to achieving a low carbon economy in high quality natural environments and achieving a better integration of land uses).

Community ownership of local environment

Looking at marine climate change issues

Pushing for Marine Litter Strategy that contributes to halving amount of litter on our shores by 2015.

Low political profile

Work with partners to ensure that Countryside Rangers have access to the correct level of training and support to continue to provide a professional service

other marine activities that may be incompatible with conservation, including spatial planning and cumulative impacts

Design guidance for new sites to cut through red tape and minimise negative visual impact of allotments

Making 'One Planet Schools' a reality - informing Government proposals to take forward this concept

Getting the SNP to deliver it's manifesto commitment to look at ancient woodland protection.

By forging LINKs with the other small species-specialist members

Seeking to redirect UK energy subsidies further up energy hierarchy and away from large wind farms

Public perception/awareness & funding priorities

Inspiring people to enjoy and value woods and trees

#### **Q.10. Do you see LINK as being able to assist in progressing these areas?**

24 responses. Yes 96%. No 4%.

Recognising that most LINK focus is on the natural environment and particularly biodiversity, sees the LINK as a holistic network where heritage, landscape and access concerns can be integrated into a general concept of the environment to produce a more sustainable future. This has successfully been done eg in our first concern through the SOA work. The LINK network offers considerable expertise in dealing with the ScotGovt and Parliament; expertise not within the capacity of a small organisation.

Yes but there is an issue in that we have limited resources with which to influence the debate within LINK. We are also disappointed at the lack of focus historically given to this issue (wind energy) in the LTF.

LINK could clearly assist. However, not confident that these aims will become more of a priority for LINK. Staff time tends to be skewed to particular areas of work - either because they are hot topics - recently marine and climate change - or because staff are working closely with fulltime campaigners on these - e.g. marine officers. Whilst marine and CC were Bills, so was WANE.

We have very limited resources for advocacy, but have appreciated the level of support we have through LINK membership to 'punch above our weight' and hope that this can continue.

5 other comments relate to work going on via the taskforces. One other suggests a food TF has been mooted.

**Q.11. LINK is a member of the International Union for Conservation and Nature and the European Environmental Bureau. Do you feel that your organisation receives sufficient information via LINK on EU and international issues/initiatives from IUCN and EEB?**

25 responses. Yes 40%. No 16%. No opinion 44%.

**Q. 12. Would your organisation like to engage more at the EU and international levels through LINK processes?**

Yes 48%. No 42%.

16 comments. Most cite lack of capacity or for some that this, realistically, is done at UK or EU level, though recognising the usefulness of the supplementary role LINK plays.

3 hope Civilscape will be helpful.

This is difficult to accomplish, given resources. Perhaps it needs to be a collaborative effort among the members alerting one another to emerging issues before considering whether to put collective resource behind any particular issue.

Of course I recognise that engagement in Europe is important therefore 'no' is only ticked in this instance due to capacity constraints within our own organisation.

**Q 13. Over recent years LINK members have agreed to focus more on how the environment is managed at the local level, in respect of the concordat between local and national government. This has taken the form of developing asks around SOAs, monitoring progress, auditing SOAs, developing a local election manifesto, dialogue with local and national government bodies. What would you like to see LINK doing in the three years ahead at the local government level?**

25 responses:

More detailed engagement: 16%

Same level of scrutiny and engagement: 72%

Less scrutiny and engagement: 12%

#### Q. 14. And in that respect will your organisation want:

To be actively involved in local governance work via LINK?	29.2%
To quietly endorse local governance work by LINK?	66.7%
To not engage in local governance work in any way?	4.2%

11 Comments, some explaining lack of capacity, included:

Or engage in it ourselves would be another alternative). Surely this is a task force issue - not something to divert the whole of LINK's strategy. The risk of this being seen as something which LINK staff engage extensively with is that it will distract even more from considering the high level assessment of "what's happening to the environment?". It's the equivalent of the hard decisions landscape organisations have to make about whether to engage with all the detailed local planning, etc, or continue to target the top level process.

I see little alternative to substantial engagement at a local level, not only because of the political drive towards greater local decision-making and accountability but because people increasingly want to have a say in what happens locally and are distrustful of outsiders telling them what should happen. My personal view is that by and large these local voices are more sympathetic to the environmental cause than those of many of the major 'powers in the land'. Certainly there remains a big job to be done in raising environmental awareness, let alone commitment, in most parts of local govt. Our capacity to contribute to such efforts is limited but we would wish to play a part both in shaping the wider, national approach and in engaging in a focused way in areas where parks either exist or are a realistic possibility.

Limited capacity to engage but will continue to be involved in developing SOAs and National Performance Indicators. We do not have the capacity to be involved at individual council level and so will not be involved with the forthcoming local government elections.

Involved with a range of local authorities. We tend to base this work around specific properties and it is a long-term engagement, rather than tied into the electoral cycle.

#### QUESTIONS ON STRATEGIC PROCESSES

#### Q.15. Please rate how effectively the LINK network plans its forward programme using the following methods:

Answer Options	Used ineffectively	Neutral	Used effectively	N/A	Rating Average	Response Count
Horizon scanning	0	4	17	2	2.81	23
Political Strategy Reporting Process	0	2	21	0	2.91	23
Annual Strategic planning meetings	0	6	16	1	2.73	23
Annual collation of member body priorities	2	9	11	1	2.41	23
Taskforce forward plans	3	9	12	0	2.38	24
Operating Plan and updates	0	10	12	1	2.55	23
Comments (including suggestions for improvement)						8

Comments were mostly from those who did not feel sufficiently knowledgeable:

The LINK network planning is constrained not by the planning process adopted by the LINK secretariat and more the capacity of individual members to respond and appreciate the wide range topics and priorities supported by member bodies and taskforces.



**Q.16. Please rate how effectively the LINK network evaluates lessons from its work and learns and progresses using the following methods**

Answer Options	Used ineffectively	Neutral	Used effectively	N/A	Rating Average	Response Count
After-action reviews by taskforces and projects	1	13	6	3	2.25	23
Peer review amongst taskforces	2	12	4	5	2.11	23
Carrying out evaluative discussions at networking	3	9	8	3	2.25	23
Comments (including suggestions for improvement)						10

**Comments:**

The wide range of subject areas and interests covered at the network meetings and by the TFs means there's not always capacity to evaluate effectively successes and failures of the LINK network.

AARs v useful - could possibly do more of these.

Peer review at networking meetings very useful for testing our work against wider priorities.

Too much reporting and planning, too little concentration on outcomes.

Answers to the first two are neutral since in the marine TF, it has been such a fast-moving policy area that there hasn't always been a great amount of time to take stock. Where we have done so it has been as part of reporting to funders (charitable trusts EFF and TBT). I also don't know about after-action reviews by any other taskforces. I think evaluative discussions are always open and conducted in an atmosphere where it is not difficult to provide constructive criticism if merited. For that reason I think evaluative discussions at networking meetings have been useful.

**Q.17. LINK's annual strategic planning meeting in November looks ahead to wider horizons and contexts which may impact the environment and our political strategy. This meeting is informed by political strategy reports provided twice a year, forward planning by taskforces and information about individual members' own plans for the same period. Does this current process allow us to develop an appropriately strategic forward work plan for the following year ahead?**

Yes: 100%

The planning day can feel like a 'long day' and the process quite challenging. This opinion may relate to the fact that we are not engaged with many of the issues that LINK works on, and the focus can be very conservation / biodiversity biased.

It achieves this through the facilitation process of the chair which is crucial to defining these strategic objectives. LINK depends on a core of committed individuals rather than a core of committed organisations and so it is sometimes difficult to get a true representation of all member interests.

I might have ticked another box called 'I think so'. The reason being, such plans are often clear at the end of the strategic planning meetings but when commencing with taskforce more targeted work, I rarely return to the higher level pan-LINK strategy.

Really not sure on this - very difficult to get right/balance info coming in and then development of plans, overall sense is that LINK do collate an appropriate level of info from member bodies/provide sufficient opportunities for member bodies to contribute ideas and suggestions into the process and likewise then LINK had to work with this info to produce forward work plan.

Process has been honed carefully over the years and is better than ever as a result.

Brilliantly.

One respondent heard that it and other days were good, and another was not sufficiently engaged to comment.



**Q.18. How do you rate LINK's current use of the following tactics and tools in pursuing our strategic objectives?**

Answer Options	Used ineffectively	Neither effective nor ineffective	Used effectively	N/A
Balancing setting as opposed to responding to the	2	4	13	4
Campaigning	3	7	12	1
Participating "inside the tent"	2	3	17	1
Resigning from "the tent" to achieve change	4	10	1	8
Constructive criticism of government policy and	0	5	18	0
Solutions-focussed proposals	0	6	16	1
General advocacy (submissions, briefings,	0	4	19	0
Dialogue (with ministers, Scottish Government,	0	5	18	0
Working in partnership (e.g. with BEFS, SCCS etc)	1	11	11	0
Media work	3	8	9	2

**Comments:**

Don't see it as LINK's job to provide solutions to some of the most difficult problems facing society. It is LINK's job to identify and flag up environmental concerns and work with others towards solutions. LINK could walk away from the tent more often or publicise it when LINK's cogent view has been ignored. I don't think LINK sets the agenda and it may well be asking too much to think LINK could. LINK seems happy to engage with Ministers, SCOTGOVT, etc. but less comfortable criticising them.

The neutral votes relate to the effectiveness of LINK rather than the efforts undertaken. LINK does all the above - producing briefings and dialogue with ministers - but it is not always clear it is being effective. Some of this may just reflect the political process and a lack of interest in LINK concerns by those external individuals and bodies LINK is trying to influence. However it is always worth considering how to make communication more effective.

Constructive and robust criticism can be an effective tool when used carefully and appropriately. Sometimes feel LINK doesn't play its hand to best effect. Criticism isn't always constructive and can alienate those we really oughtn't.

I'm not sure we are that effective at "Participating 'inside the tent'". I suspect the SCOTGOVT like it when we do this because they get more out of it. It's just a feeling I have though. Our resigning for the tent over the biodiversity groups seemed to have no impact at all. I'm not confident I can point to the achievements in LINK changing Ministers' minds on any topic we have taken to them. I've not seen this happen to my recollection. We don't engage much in media work but that is conscious and I don't see how this can change much at the moment.

Parliamentary monitoring particularly useful for us. Also SEW.

From experience on the Marine TF, most of the above tools have been used effectively, although the jury is properly out until we have our final MPA network and National Marine Plan. Only at that stage will we know how far in the tent it was appropriate to be so to speak. However, experience to date suggests that the approach taken, including constructive engagement with Got, has delivered as strong a Marine (Scotland) Act as could be expected and we have had some low-key though important policy victories during development of the MPA Guidelines, Scottish MPA project, the developing National Marine Plan and various plans for marine renewables development. I can say this without bias since it is a reflection on the calibre of LINK marine staff we currently have and also have had as well as the support provided by the Parliamentary Officer at key stages and relevant officers within the MTF. I don't have detailed experience of other TFs so could not extend my assessment far beyond the marine work.

### Q.19. Do you agree with the current target audiences for LINK work?

Answer Options	Target less	Targetting sufficiently	Target more
MSPs, Committees, Researchers, SPICe	0	19	4
Scottish Government	0	21	2
Scottish Government Agencies	0	19	3
Scottish Local Councils, Councillors and associated	3	11	8
UK MPs/ committees on occasion	3	12	7
Other voluntary sector networks e.g. SCVO, Poverty	0	12	10
Private sector/business interests	1	12	10
The media	2	11	10
Academia/Research	2	14	6
The interested public	3	15	5

23 responses, 8 comments:

On certain issues, we could target other NGOs etc outwith LINK but with shared goals e.g. in the poverty or health sectors, to strengthen lobbying to key stakeholders.

LINK needs to ensure it is engaging fully with its members, hearing what is said and offering member organisations an opportunity to engage with those members beyond their particular interest/TF. Congress could be used to allow member orgs to explain their work to others and attend workshops on areas beyond their usual work. When I first attended congress, I vividly remember seeing Calum explain the marine asks of the time. LINK seems to have moved to an agenda of inviting in speakers from other sectors and not using the expertise within. The wording in the search for the president - about bringing in people from social and economic sector - also seemed to suggest a lack of confidence in our own expertise. I think this contributes to a lack of understanding between different TF interests.

Those things identified as 'target more' (i.e. working with the media) could be done through the Task Forces.

The neutral position has been taken here because all audiences could be targeted more but LINK capacities are finite. Different audiences need to be targeted for different purposes and a comparative approach as suggested here is not appropriate. It depends on the message and the outcome sought.

think that there is more scope to work collaboratively with bodies such as SNH (which doesn't necessarily mean doing things together or even supporting stances, just keeping each other informed and where possibly operating in complementary ways). As to local government, I suspect there is going to be a need for a real effort to engage after this year's elections.

Ticked the box for targetting Scottish Local Councils but realise, from our experience, that having any influence with COSLA is hard and slow!

Some of these are more suited to member bodies, ie media or public

## QUESTIONS ON 'LINK AND YOUR ORGANISATION'

**Q.20. LINK communicates in various ways to members to keep them informed about LINK activities and other policy information. How useful does your organisation find the following?**

Answer Options	Not useful	Quite useful	Very useful	N/A
Taskforces and their communications	0	9	15	0
Targeted emails from staff	0	11	14	0
Website	2	12	9	1
Inductions (to new member reps, trustees, Taskforce	1	3	9	10
Parliamentary Monitoring	1	7	17	0
Monthly Bulletin	2	10	12	0
Newsletter	1	12	11	0
CD Review of the Year	7	8	10	0

Comments:

Those rated as not useful are because we are a large org with 'in house' expertise and engaged in so a wide range of LINK work anyway - not because they are not good products of value/use to others.

LINK communications are a bit 'scattergun'. They don't feel particularly 'targeted'. This might be solved by communicating more through the Task Forces and less through the organisational reps?

LINK supplies useful information and it is up to the individual and the member bodies how much they engage and therefore how much they gain from this network.

There is only so much time available to read newsletters and keep up to speed, but the website is an excellent way to catch up on latest news or things missed in newsletters. I am not sure whether it still necessary to send the LINK newsletter in hard copy. If all received electronically it would save LINK time and money.

If I'm completely honest we don't use the website very much at all. The Review of the Year is nice, but once watched it tends to disappear in to a drawer - a lot of effort for little gain?

CD Review of the Year is a masterpiece - keep them coming!

The Parliamentary Monitoring just keeps improving. Kate is doing an even better job than others in the past. I think it is a great success.

All these things are valued part of the service provided by LINK!

**Q.21. Does the information you receive from LINK adequately guide you in how you can engage with LINK's various work areas?**

24 responses. Yes 95%. No 4%.

To a point, although we receive too much. Less but better targeted contact might help?

Much of the LINK information is developed between member bodies but stimulated by the LINK networks, eg through Taskforces.

How would I know if it doesn't?

It admittedly can feel a bit like information overload at times but better that all the info is there if needed than otherwise. The quick bulletins with updated summaries of useful dates (networking meetings, Congress etc) are handy.

Yes but rightly requires engagement in key processes e.g. network planning meetings, ad hoc meetings on particular key issues etc.

**Q.22 How useful does your organisation find the regular LINK opportunities to meet fellow members, share intelligence, discuss and develop consensus?**

Answer Options	Not useful	Quite useful	Very useful	N/A
Annual Strategic Planning Meeting	1	8	11	3
Network meetings (January, April, June)	2	7	9	5
Congress	3	5	13	2
Topic focussed seminars	0	4	18	1
Taskforces/forums	0	5	17	0
LINK Receptions (Festive/Scottish Environment week)	2	6	14	1
Training days (advocacy and media mainly)	0	7	13	3

23 responses.

Our attendees at training events have given us positive feedback. The strategic planning process can be 'hard work' and we don't attend the network meetings.

The planning and network meetings are mostly seen as a necessary part of the work and not really a chance to meet fellow members. The taskforces can equally be seen as onerous but a necessary part of the process of exchanging information and developing consensual positions.

I think we would find them all very useful but unfortunately we don't manage to get down to many of the meetings at the moment due to capacity, so I would say very useful to all but some we haven't been to for a while.

All these networking opportunities are absolutely invaluable for a smaller player where LINK helps in facilitating access to important decision-makers and other experts in the network. Of course, parliamentary and civil service access is porous for us as an organisation, but using the LINK channels can be more efficient and save time and effort.

LINK Receptions: The environment week receptions and related activities can and have been very useful for our organisation. The festive and other similar get together have not been very useful at all other than to talk shop to folk we already know and work with. Although we see the benefit of Congress, trying to drum up support for it among council members has proved difficult!

I hold my hands up here and admit that I've not been to many of the planning/network meetings due to pressures of workload and working in a small organisation.

Training days very good indeed. Receptions are excellent for networking and good fun too.

Seminars always fascinating.

Found Congress really useful and uplifting some years back. Have missed some recently but thought the last one by bringing in outside speakers missed an opportunity to allow us to talk to ourselves and also it didn't offer workshop opportunities - nearly always the most interesting I find; getting to know new folk.

**Q. 23. How aware of LINK's work are colleagues in your organisation?**

Answer Options	Response Percent
Some/all regularly circulated with LINK news	30.4%
Some/all informed on an ad hoc basis with relevant	73.9%
Not generally kept informed of LINK's work and role	4.3%

Comments:

No answer - because all the above apply!

I circulate so much LINK info to them that they sometimes think I spend too much time on LINK and not enough on my own organisation - without realising that the former helps the latter!

Colleagues are interested when an opportunity presents itself to provide feedback. Some UK colleagues don't always appreciate the degree to which SEL is useful in Scotland since it is my understanding, due to a combination of scale, geography, proximity, culture and indeed necessity, the network is perhaps more integrated in Scotland.

Only limiting factor is time!

**Q.24. Has your organisation considered nominating someone to the Board for 2012 and beyond?**

Answer Options	Response Percent
Yes	16.7%
No	58.3%
Someone from my organisation is already on the LINK Board	25.0%

24 responses.

6 comments, some saying they would consider it either themselves or for their council members.

One respondent felt they would be 'swimming against the tide' so better to network with those whose aims are closely matched.

**Q 25. Is your organisation willing to convene or be a depute for any of LINK's taskforces in the next three years as positions become available?**

Answer Options	Response Percent
Yes	27.3%
No	27.3%
Organisation already convenes or deputises on a	45.5%

22 responses.

Comments:

Two staff have convened/deputised in past. Don't feel LINK's programme will support our key priorities sufficiently for us to give this time. Also, probably not helpful as it would bring key divisions to the surface. Whilst we think these divisions should be looked at, this would not be the way to do it.

## Q.26. How important to your organisation is its membership of LINK in:

Answer Options	Not important	Important	Very important	Indispensable	N/A	Rating Average
Achieving strategic goals	5	12	6	1	0	2.13
Voice, messaging, promotion	4	14	6	1	0	2.16
Accessing decision makers	4	8	9	4	0	2.52
Information and intelligence gathering and sharing	0	8	11	5	0	2.88
Making and keeping contacts with the eNGO sector	2	3	12	7	0	3.00
Developing alliances and networking more widely	3	8	7	6	0	2.67
Consensus building on key issues	3	10	6	5	0	2.54
Taking part in relevant Stakeholder Groups	3	11	9	1	0	2.33
Strengthening your role (if small NGO)	4	6	7	4	2	2.52
Adding credibility (if large NGO)	3	6	4	1	6	2.21
Avoiding overlap and duplication	6	10	5	2	0	2.13
Developing a more informed approach	2	7	11	4	0	2.71
Broadening agendas	4	9	9	2	0	2.38
Taking forward an issue that can't be pursued	3	3	13	4	1	2.78
Sharing skills and approaches	0	12	10	2	0	2.58
Recognising issues where conflict may occur and	4	7	8	3	1	2.45
Developing trust with other eNGOs	1	9	8	5	1	2.74
Other (please specify in comments)	1	1	0	0	5	1.50
Other (please specify)						

7 comments:

LINK has failed to deal with the conflict within on energy and landscape and taken a long time to acknowledge the depth of that division. It may well be that this issue is not going to be resolved or decreased in importance.

Unfortunately it appears as if we find the above largely unimportant. Much of what LINK does is irrelevant or duplicative to our effort. However, the opportunities for information sharing and partnership are important and valued. We welcome the inclusion of some of the issues that we work on in LINK's agenda, which has allowed us to better engage than in the past. However, LINK is still too heavily conservation/biodiversity-focussed. We appreciate and value the LINK staff very much, but are not well aligned with a number of other LINK member bodies, suggesting it might be 'too broad a church'? This makes consensus difficult to reach.

The role of LINK here is potentially indispensable though it has to be allied to our work in other networks and on topics not covered within the framework of LINK

A mid-point between important/not important might better reflect our view on a number of matters (quite useful, maybe).

Some of these markings relate more to potential than to actual current experience (in so far as I understand this).

Engagement through the LINK process I have found useful in helping consolidate the organisations credibility in Scotland. There are many work streams where this credibility was already established, but working closely within LINK has been an important opportunity to help reinforce that credibility and areas of joint working, both with the Scottish Government and other NGOs.

Recognising issues where conflict may occur and building consensus: We think LINK has failed in the context of our main area of concern.

**Q 27. How would you rate your organisation's overall satisfaction with LINK and its services to you as a member?**

Answer Options	Response Percent
Very satisfied	60.0%
Satisfied	28.0%
Neutral	8.0%
Dissatisfied	4.0%

25 responses.

Comments:

Staff are informed and helpful and information exchange and provision is good. However, we do not find LINK is helping us deliver on our core aims.

Involvement with LINK can be quite onerous but it is an important network with which to be engaged.

Broadly satisfied, but a more nuanced approach to engaging decision-makers is sometimes called for.

Broadly satisfied but suspect there is potential to secure significant greater benefit, but only if our org can make the effort to engage more and to relate its agenda to others'.

LINK is essential and good value for money. I would like to think that my organisation's contribution to the network (which functions as a result of inputs from member bodies) reciprocates this important engagement both for LINK and other organisations, particularly on the taskforce my org is most involved with.



## QUESTIONS ON LINK FUNDING

**Q 28. In tighter economic climes, how would your organisation prioritise the range of typical LINK services below, for retention in the period to 2015?**

Answer Options	Not necessary to retain	Neutral	Retain
Quarterly meetings including strategic planning	1	8	15
Congress	1	9	14
Topic-focussed member seminars	1	8	14
Events in parliament (launches, briefings, post-LINK presence at party conference & LINK fringes	0	8	16
Festive Reception	3	16	5
Scottish Environment Week & Reception	8	9	7
Discretionary Project funding to support TF work	2	10	12
Staff support with conferences, commissioned work	3	8	13
Staff coordination between TFs, integration,	3	5	16
Political strategy development	2	7	15
Support for active president & honorary fellows	0	3	20
Regular circulation of information via bulletin	4	9	11
Regular circulation of newsletter	2	6	16
Regular circulation of parliamentary monitoring	7	8	10
Annual CD review of LINK year	1	5	18
Coordination of rolling manifesto asks & elections	11	8	5
Relationship building with Agencies, local government	1	8	15
Membership of umbrellas such as IUCN, EEB,	1	6	17
Staff support with priority areas (eg local governance,	6	10	8
Training days (in advocacy, media work)	1	7	16
Regularly maintained website as resource and	3	10	11
	1	9	15

As we are not active in political campaigning the scoring for these overt activities has been downgraded. Other organisations with a more campaign focus will take a different view.

I am conscious that I have not suggested any work area that doesn't need retaining, simply because I recognise the role and value of all in ideal funding world. However a neutral stance provides an indication of priorities from the perspective of our organisation.

That is an impressive list of services! This was the hardest question of all - not keen to drop anything but understand may need to.

**Q 29. Please indicate what level of support your organisation would consider paying (please mark as many as you like)**

Answer Options	Response Percent
Current membership fee plus inflation	91.3%
Current membership fee plus 10%	13.0%
Current membership fee plus 20%	4.3%

Ironically, we might consider paying more if LINK stopped taking government funding - either directly or through SNH. This would allow LINK to advocate more freely and also reduce the amount

of staff time on filling in paperwork. It would unfortunately be a major problem as LINK relies heavily on this.

We find LINK overly expensive and would be unwilling to pay more. Our membership of other equivalent or analogous bodies, with which we engage more and receive more in return, costs us considerably less than our LINK subscription. We are concerned about LINK's value for money for our organisation but have chosen to engage more rather than withdraw at present.

Our membership of LINK depends on continued financial support for a project officer and supplementary support from another charity. Without this assistance we cannot afford the membership fees and budgets currently set do not allow for an increase in fees.

With a question mark re "plus inflation".

Could be more generous if we can get our own financial act together!

Funding is very difficult at present (as with many small charities)

I couldn't go beyond above without discussion with senior management which I don't have the opportunity to do in order to complete this survey in time.

We have just been told to make a 10% cut to all budgets from 2012. Increasing above inflation will be difficult.

Our fee is v good value at present as we are so small, so could cope with slight increase

**Q. 30. Please comment if you wish on any other factors about your relationship with LINK e.g. governance, information and communications, induction, contact with Trustees and with staff, LINK's use of IT and its wider relationships.**

We have been concerned about whether LINK's priorities and ours are sufficiently aligned to justify membership and time commitment. We continue to assess it. Membership is the equivalent of one day a week of dedicated staff time, for instance. We would have preferred to discuss this in person. However, staff repeatedly requested we fill this in. In fact, several of LINK's Board have been told of our concerns.

If LINK didn't exist, we would have to invent it. My relationship with and perception of LINK and LINK staff has been unwaveringly positive and constructive.

In general we have serious concerns about our relationship with LINK and the return on our membership subscription and the cost of staff and volunteer involvement. We are concerned that LINK's agenda is dominated by larger NGOs which have different agendas from our own particularly relating to the upland landscape. Getting more value from LINK will be challenging as we have limited resources with which to engage, therefore, our ability to address the dominance of organisations which conflict with our own agenda is difficult if not impossible.

Always a very friendly service - great staff ( x 2)

Please note that I represent two very small orgs, with ltd involvement with LINK, and very modest financial contributions, and ltd knowledge of LINK, so my responses are incomplete.

## **Bodies registered as members of LINK during the period of the member survey**

Archaeology Scotland  
Association for the Protection of Rural Scotland  
Badenoch and Strathspey Conservation Group  
Bat Conservation Trust  
Buglife  
Bumble Bee Conservation Trust  
Butterfly Conservation Scotland  
Cairngorms Campaign  
Friends of the Earth Scotland  
Froglife Trust  
Hebridean Whale & Dolphin Trust  
John Muir Trust  
Living Streets  
Marine Conservation Society  
Mountaineering Council of Scotland  
The National Trust for Scotland  
North East Mountain Trust  
Plantlife Scotland  
Ramblers Scotland  
Rivers and Fisheries Trusts of Scotland  
RSPB Scotland  
Scottish Allotments and Gardens Society  
Scottish Badgers  
Scottish Campaign for National Parks  
Scottish Countryside Rangers' Association  
Scottish Native Woods  
Scottish Raptor Studies Group  
Scottish Wild Land Group  
Scottish Wildlife Trust  
Soil Association Scotland  
Sustrans Scotland  
Whale and Dolphin Conservation Society  
Wildfowl and Wetlands Trust  
Woodland Trust Scotland  
WWF Scotland