

**S.E.LINK Economic Group
Business Engagement workshop
27th March 2017**

Present:

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Note of discussion

This is the recording of points made in discussion at this event and does not represent a position adopted by S.E.LINK or its members.

Main points

- LINK members have varying approaches to and policies around engagement with businesses and accepting sponsorship from businesses. If of interest, RSPB are happy to share these policies with LINK members who are thinking about business engagement.
- Business people find it easiest to speak about their own business; then their sector; and on general topics are rarely able to speak for 'business as a whole'. Before engaging with the business sector it is important to be clear about the purpose of the engagement.
- Research is needed in order to pinpoint with whom to engage to achieve that purpose.
- Additional work is needed before any meetings or discussions – people in business are generally short of time, so prepare the ENGO case in terms that resonate with the business or the individual.

Types of engagement and experiences:

- Rangers Association: Individual members benefit from good relations with local businesses to help get jobs done. The Association is also interested in developing relationships with businesses to get core funding, but have not done this.
- RSPB: Have developed a number of partnerships with specific businesses who fund particular projects with which they feel some resonance and 'get something out of'. As yet, RSPB have not sought to affect the business practices of such partners. It is difficult to find businesses who tick all the boxes – RSPB have strict guidelines and due diligence process, but there are inevitably difficult grey areas. Need trusted relationships, eNGOs have to invest time. Businesses need to see added value – they prefer to support projects rather than policy related work.

- WWF: examples of engagement with businesses who have the potential to become greener and money is accepted on the basis that business change their practice. Sometimes businesses then drag their heels, so it is important to have a contract and good negotiating skills.
- FoES. Generally are wary of direct approaches to individual businesses and have very strict rules that apply to any engagement; but have had a couple of partnerships. Recognise that dialogue and insight from within sectors is important.
- SWT: If you want change to happen, you have to understand how businesses work. To make political change, you need allies across the sectors and so you have to talk. The language needs to be different. The Scottish Forum are promoting the Natural Capital Protocol and trying to get businesses to use it to identify natural capital impact and dependencies. Events are purposefully tailored to attract business audiences. We have found it challenging to maintain engagement, with initial enthusiasm falling off to a certain extent.

Ethics of engagement

- ENGOs have their own policies on sponsorship which could be shared if of interest.
- Is it wrong to engage with businesses who do not have good environmental credentials? Or sometimes do we have to?
- There is a role for all types of engagement from campaigning to dialogue.
- Noted that some large businesses have very distinct departments and it can be worth working with progressive departments to bolster them.

Policy Oriented engagement

- There is a move away from traditional CSR towards more active engagement.
- ENGOs traditionally engage with bodies such as NFUS, Confor, renewables sector on policy issues.
- There is the question of whether unions or confederations really represent all of their sectors, such as NFUS - the feeling being that smaller farmers probably don't get very good representation. Similarly with fishing industry.
- Likewise, talking to SCDI or other membership bodies is not the same as engaging with the individual businesses.
- The Food Coalition is trying to engage with small farmers to give them a platform.
- Not all businesses are against regulation – it levels the playing field and rewards those who are ahead of the curve.

What has helped engagement

- Language is important. Natural Capital language has helped. There is a need to talk in terms that businesses relate to and understand. Infographics have been useful to describe stories and surveys to collect basic information. Staff from a business background or with previous employment in business are very useful.
- Getting to know individuals and businesses on a case by case basis – they are all different but generally short of time.
- Unions also understand how businesses work.
- Lobby groups like CBI often take the line of the loudest or most powerful members or lowest common denominator. It is better to go to sectors or other sub-sets.

- Businesses like to be seen to doing something local – localness and sense of relevance are important.
- Partnering more neutral organisations such as RSA in engagement can also be useful, as businesses are often nervous of ENGOS. Also focusing on more neutral aims, such as education, can be a good starting point.
- The Circular Economy can also offer a useful approach, as it can offer savings to the business as well as environmental benefits.

Challenges

- We are often trying to persuade companies to enhance or reduce their impact on public goods which is a challenge. However, examples of the whisky industry investing in water quality which benefits others as well as their business interests.
- Many people don't care about wildlife, plants, habitats – it helps to link the environment to people, children and health. It is useful to remember that to businesses people are 'workforce' or 'customer' and to government benefits might be seen as 'a preventative spend'
- More often than not, the data does not exist to make a 'business case' for environmentally responsible actions, and often the uncertainties around 'net benefit' figures are used as a reason for not acknowledging the case for environmental / social action.
- Often ENGOS lack the capacity and knowledge to effectively engage with businesses. RSPB are working on some case studies of examples of engagement.
- There are often hidden but extremely important parts of the chain between primary producers and final product. This 'middle businesses' are often large and powerful. For example, Maltsters buy barley from all over and sell it on to the whisky industry. It makes it hard for whisky businesses to push for environmentally friendly barley production.
- Businesses can't always follow the most environmentally friendly practices due to regulation.

