

## LINK Members' Congress – Successful Environmental Campaigning: Inspiring Greater Success.

Presentations:

[Refit of the Natura Directives](#) EU wide campaign to keep the Habitats and Species and Birds Directives intact – **Paul Walton**, Head of Habitats and Species, RSPB Scotland, LINK rep to the Environment Links UK campaign steering group.

[#Don't Take the P \(out of MPAs\)](#) LINK Marine Group's 2016 campaign for effective fisheries management measures in Marine Protected Areas – **Calum Duncan**, Head of Conservation Scotland, Marine Conservation Society, LINK Marine Group Convener.

[Have you got the Bottle](#) the coalition for a deposit return scheme in Scotland – **Jenni Hume**, Association for the Protection of Rural Scotland, HYGTB Campaign Manager.

[Beavers reintroduction](#): managing the return of nature's engineers to Scotland – **Susan Davies**, Director of Conservation, Scottish Wildlife Trust.

**Fracking**, stopping exploitation of unconventional oil and gas in Scotland – **Mary Church**, Head of Campaigns, Friends of the Earth Scotland.

Mary's talk outlined the climate case against fracking; the history of the campaign from the community at Airth; some of the issues for eNGOs involved in working closely with communities; the timeliness of the Yes campaign getting behind the anti-fracking campaign; the Ineos court case against Scottish Government clarifying the law; hence the need to get a complete ban; and the problems faced in England.

### Plenary Discussion, chaired by Charles Dundas

Charles asked each presenter to summarise what stood out most for them from their particular experience. Answers were:

- ninjas
- making the most of opportunity
- keep your eyes on the goal
- grassroots communities
- narrowing down the options for policy makers

### Questions for the panel.

*Q. On fracking in the Airth area, why wasn't it more known to people. Was it a cover up?*

In the early days of its development, coal bed methane extraction didn't look that threatening. It was spread out across the Central Belt. Hydraulic fracturing ruined one farmer's field, but that was only one person, and a short period of drilling. Local authorities didn't know what they were dealing with. Before Dart energy came into it, from Australia, the only interest in the previous 20 years was from small Scottish companies. Then it started to become apparent what we were dealing with. The film *Gasland* raised awareness of the impacts of fracking in Pennsylvania, and put it on the map in Europe too, and in the US, as although Pennsylvania is well populated awareness was low within the US. Cuadrilla was starting in England, the Priesthole earthquake was a factor in making local authorities wake up. Falkirk Council kept delaying a decision because they hadn't the knowledge to deal with it. They wanted it to be called in, which eventually happened.

Clare Symonds: The talk on fracking really demonstrated the power of working together through LINK. Planning Democracy really benefited from it, other things burgeoned from that campaign. The Airth public local inquiry raised awareness of the lack of webcasting, which Planning Democracy was able to push for to have as standard. Now local networks in the area are organised and are contributing to the Planning Bill. So one successful campaign can lead to others.

Jenni Hume: The Deposit Return Ninjas involved a group had previously worked together on the plastic bag charge. That is a model that worked and was taken to the campaign for deposit return.

Paul Walton: Described how the Natura Directive campaign came together as Environment Links UK, which was really the first time we had worked so closely together. We won that incredible victory and then Brexit happened, though there are 27 other states in the EU that benefit too. Now the ELUK bodies have morphed into the Brexit nature campaign. There is a real burgeoning of NGO groups – also one to watch in terms of consistency of message – that has helped to unify the NGO voice.

Calum Duncan: COAST is the most obvious example of a successful community group. Others take inspiration from them. Sometimes community groups can be frustrated with NGOs not going far enough. With 'Don't take the P' it was a perfect opportunity for all to get on board and amplify the message. It is important to know the spectrum of views and be tactical.

*Q. With a lot of these campaigns, part of the success was numbers. Now wondering if we are entering into a post petition, post tick-box age for campaigning, and what is the alternative.*

Mary Church: If the responses back up what Government wants to do, it describes it in one way; otherwise they will be dismissed as campaign responses. Now it is obligatory to get the numbers. You have to do it but it has increasingly less impact. For me, the answer is to get as many good quality and detailed responses in, and to get people sitting in front of the decision makers. With the fracking campaign, we had a two-year moratorium where Government took on various studies, it wanted to involve stakeholders from the start. There were pros and cons about the process, but it had people from the affected communities in meetings with the researchers and the civil servants, over a long period of time.

Susan Davies: Numbers matter, to have the voice out there speaking loudly and consistently. It is not just about public reaction, it is also about softer advocacy skills. Beavers has taken 23 years; nothing has changed, other than the civil servants and the Ministers.

Jenni Hume: We didn't have a petition for DRS in Scotland. The Daily Mail came on board, and needed a way of getting its readers on board. We were not sure we would get the numbers, but it done to keep the media champion happy. We asked them to work with us about the kind of stories that would work. Brewers, and Outdoors groups, for example, so we recruited some for coverage. Petitions were not part of it.

Calum Duncan: Prioritisation. We worked with Fidra on what the Cabinet Secretary was interested in, and hope we were not wrong. MCS was the only organisation to encourage a response to the plastic bag charge and marine litter strategy which had value in that all were treated as individual responses. It was quite a niche thing, so was powerful. Cotton buds - Government wants to do it. Still a place for it, horses for courses.

Paul Walton: There will inevitably be a tailing off of impact. The 500k signatures to the EU took the Commissioners by surprise. They don't get surprised twice. We have the Petition Committee of the Scottish Parliament. If it takes the petition seriously it will be taken forward. I don't know the

answer. I had not realised the fracking campaign was so grass roots. Its expensive, its labour intensive, communities don't always do what you want them to do. Obviously there was serendipity, but smartly played FoES.

*Q. Though we have the occasional warm glow of wins, we see the way agriculture continues to destroy biodiversity, the hills continue to be overgrazed, the overall picture is negative. We tried to stop the Cairngorms funicular, and the Menie golf course, and TRPA continues to be a failure as the decades roll by. What were your most significant failure and what were the lessons?*

Paul Walton: Agree the overall picture on biodiversity is bad, but finds one has to be an optimist. Its not especially helpful to let it get you too angry. What impressed me is the calm, rational, understanding of humanity that is going on, striking chords, using the moment as Susan was describing, doggedness in terms of the marine environment, almost the most challenging issue we face. I believe if we don't have optimism we cannot progress.

Jenni Hume: Cannot think of anything that went wrong. We've been fortunate it terms of timing, have had the primary legislation in place since the Climate Change Act, commitments in the manifesto. The SNP needed some bold policies, so this was seized on as a flagship policy. John Mayhew added its happening in England and not in Wales, and NI doesn't have a Government to do it. It is not an ideal solution to have a half UK solution. We are nudging away trying to improve things, country by country, and we care about the whole planet.

Calum Duncan: uses hashtag ocean optimism a lot. As MCS feels quite proud we helped to be part of some big changes in Scotland which couldn't have happened without the power of networks. As a community we have an understanding that a big part of the destruction of land is farming. We don't have that same understanding that for the seas it is fishing. It is getting out of those pockets. Communities are ahead of it, looking for a 3 mile limit – why is there still trawling and dredging? It is complicated.

Susan Davies: we failed in not getting the vision for Scotland's uplands taken forward. Its been a long hard push, we have not given up, there needs to be a wider public debate. The door was slammed on SNH's report. After been in conservation for 30 years, I will not give up because one door shuts. At the moment the opportunity is in the grouse moor review group.

Mary Church: tends to agree, we are losing the bigger war on the key environmental big picture, its looking pretty bleak on many fronts. With climate change there is a certain schadenfreude- type optimism in that we are going to have to face the music eventually. The learning and knowledge we have accumulated is indispensable, in all of the failures and all the success when we reach the point of no return.

*Wrt beavers, what are the lessons for lynx?*

Susan: know what your management approach is going to look like from the outset and where the problems are going to arise. As we go forward with lynx, we need to ask where the problems are going to be and agree how the issues will be managed. There has to be a framework in place.

*Q. Challenges of getting political buy in, how do we learn from these successes to get the environment on an equal footing with the other things people care about?*

*Q. A common theme was the involvement of community groups, at grass roots, fundamental to their success, a very positive development which politicians have to respect. it challenges the ways in which (particularly the larger) eNGOs work. It is not easy, may mean ceding control, and can be*

*expensive. If that's a successful way of working, after all these are the voters, then how do we need to change the way we work. What does it mean for LINK members?*

*Simplifying the message, so it becomes part of the narrative?*

Paul Walton: Where do we go from here, to win the war rather than the battle. I've given you the answer as a conservationist. On the bigger question I believe the neo-liberal system is at war with the environment. There are some general ways of approaching it. Personally, I believe the answer has to be an ethical one, we have to develop a new ethical relationship with the rest of the natural world. Until we do that, we can get temporary gains, until it becomes a shared ethical vision for humanity, is what, at heart, I believe.

Calum Duncan: Roseanna Cunningham was at litter summit in Oban, getting community views, and the point there made about consumer capitalism. I completely agree that's the big problem. We had a whole session earlier today (at the members training) about framing the message. For me, the environment means everything. Humans are part of the ecosystem, that's where the problem is. How do you unpack it and make it relevant to people. And it would make us happier.

Jenni Hume: I agree it has to be relevant to people, and it has to be something they understand and relate to, in the Deposit Return campaign it was putting it in context of people's memory of taking their bottles back, a good feeling, they knew and felt good about it. If we can tailor messages in terms of what people care about, it is potentially really effective.

Susan Davies: we have to get better at showing how the approaches we advocate help them solve other problems. An organisation like SWT has 120 reserves but not boots on the ground. It's about unlocking the capacity in communities to respond and have their voices heard. With that comes risk, their objectives may be different, we must be prepared to compromise.

Mary, The second question answers the first to a large degree. Going out of our comfort zone into talking to people who are directly affected in different parts of the community. On Just Transition, the workers in the oil and gas industry, we have to talk to them and critically listen to the people in these jobs, what are the shared aims and understanding to make things work from both perspectives. For organisations including FoES, this means a shift from the high level political lobbying to being involved in communities, and bringing those messages back to the inform the people that we have the links with.

### **Sum Up – Joyce McMillan.**

As ever it is a great privilege to be the Honorary President of this network, so much expertise, enthusiasm and hard work, described so vividly and with such creativity. The passion that people who work in this area bring to their jobs is very much in evidence tonight. Thanks to all. It has been really interesting and uplifting, very positive. From the contributions I heard many of the points of successful campaigning emerged very clearly and repeatedly.

One is the **clarity of your aim**, it is very important simply to be clear what it is and not be distracted, and to sum it up in a simple slogan. In twitter culture we have come to despise brevity, but nothing is more powerful than a simple slogan. I look forward to hearing it. As Paul outlined, we can get to that simple one-liner in our positions sooner than we think.

**Complexity of the alliances and unexpectedness of some of them, and the phrase 'going out of our comfort zone.'** It is easy for environmental activists and environmental organisations to have the same terms of reference. Successful ones have forged alliances that went a long way beyond it.

With communities who are not necessarily familiar with state of the art campaigning and indeed may be hostile to it in terms of their economic interests, eg oil & gas workers. Working with groups who are in those positions is obviously tremendously important and also making alliances with other big interest groups, it is necessary to get voices in there, that other power holders would not be able to dismiss. Whether it's a voice from other power holders in the system, like some businesses; voices that will come on board as it is in their interest and in the interest of us all and to have any economic system at all.

**Opportunism and being ready for your moment.** I was reminded of the campaign for the Scottish parliament in the 1990s, how farfetched it seemed then. The Constitutional Convention thought let us work on it anyway, and came up with a plan, to be there and ready for the moment when there was an opportunity to implement it. It had the answers to all of the awkward questions that came up. There is something like that about big successful political campaigns, that you work on them and that you are ready with the ideas, with the slogan, with the networks, with the alliances, and when the moment comes, they are able to strike. Mary of the Songs, the great 19<sup>th</sup> century campaigner for land reform, not a woman of violence, but *sometimes you feel the axe in your hand and you have to strike*. When you have prepared, a moment comes when you are ready to break through, and recognising that moment is a great political skill.

**On positivity**, there are reasons to despair and some to be cheerful. For the latter, none of it is rocket science, already most of the technology is in place to do it, many of the campaigns are in place, many of us can imagine the world we need to build. In a sense the plan is there, it is taking shape, in a much wider sense. One that sooner or later will have to be implemented. That is a position of great strength. We are looking at other plans that are collapsing. Turbo capitalism offers nothing, other non-environmental democratic plans are lacking. All of us in the green movement have an idea of the future, and in the end it will be the possibility of a life for their children and grandchildren which is more secure, more balanced and without the stresses we have now. A moment will come when it will become a huge political asset. I think all of us here, work in small ways and on single issue campaigns, what we are doing is putting together an alternative sense of what our society can be. Keep up the good work.

Alice Walsh  
October 2018.