Note of the LINK Network meeting held on 11 May 2018 at the Friends Meeting House, Edinburgh

Attending: Charles Dundas, Chair (WTS), Craig Macadam (Buglife), Helen Todd (RS), Sarah Dolman (WDC), Sheila George (RSPB), Bruce Wilson (SWT), Lloyd Austin (RSPB) *pm,* Calum Duncan (MCS), Aedan Smith (RSPB), Paul Walton (RSPB), *am* Helen Senn (RZSS), James Nairne (SWBG), Alistair Whyte (Plantlife), Beryl Leatherland (SWLG), Sam Gardner (WWFS) *am,*  Diarmid Hearns (NTS) *am,* Mark Lazarowicz (HF) *am*, Staff: Jen Anderson, Daphne Vlastari, Emilie Devenport (*am),* Lisa Webb, Phoebe Cochrane, Alice Walsh, Dilraj Watson *pm*

Apologies: Eddie Palmer (S Badgers), John Thomson (SCNP), Suzanne Burgess (Buglife), John Mayhew (APRS), Matthew Crighton (FoES/Economics), Mary Church (FoES/Legal Strategy), Tim Ambrose (SWLG/CC), Maggie Keegan (BES).

1. Introductions and general LINK updates

Everyone introduced themselves and explained which Groups and Subgroups they represented at this meeting. Charles thanked all the Groups and Subgroups for their recent useful reports and evaluations on progress, and for having their meetings with SNH counterparts, so helping to ensure smooth continuation of SNH and SG grant for core work at the same level as last year.

Charles reminded **(Action: All groups and subgroups)** **all groups to hold at least one meeting per year at a more convenient location for their more remote members*.*** LINK will be getting higher quality teleconferencing equipment for both offices to make the experience of phoning into meetings better.

Charles **(Action All groups and subgroups)** **reminded all groups to make use of the expertise of Fellows** (such as Mark L, present, and engaged in the Legal Strategy Subgroup), where relevant.

Meeting noted LINK’s enhanced Discretionary Project Fund for priority work, on which there are already some calls, though scope to support further work to March 2019.

Charles welcomed Phoebe Cochrane, recruited as Sustainable Economics Officer, for the project *A Circular Economy for a Fairer Future*; and Calum Langdale, in absentia, who will continue working until November as Species Champions Co-ordinator.

The recent Board meeting had signed off some changes and additions to the [Operating Guidance](http://www.scotlink.org/linkoperatingguidanceapril2018-2/), which would be **(Action: JA)** **circulated generally with an explanation of the key changes*.*** All Leaders were asked to share these with their Groups/Subgroups.

Co-optees: If groups & subgroups wish to involve a non-member, rules are that where the organisation is eligible it cannot be co-opted and needs to join first. Where the organisation is not eligible the proposal to involve it should be checked by the board and the purpose and timescale clarified at the outset; a modest annual fee will be payable from the outset.

Organisational Supporters: Guidance clarifies what may have been an ambiguity: these bodies cannot take part in our policy groups work. Only receive advocacy monitoring, invitations to events, and have listing on our website Supporters page.

Working with partners – new and simple principles to guide, which should be referred to at the outset of any relationship, to protect all parties and LINK’s reputation (section 21).

LINK’s process of complying with Lobbying Act – as a network our compliance relies not just on staff or trustees but on any representative on LINK, or on its groups, taking part in lobbying activity which references LINK.

Guidance now carries greater reference to Fellows some of whom are now taking active part in LINK policy areas and sometimes represent LINK externally; this helps to protect them.

Guidance carries greater reference to LINK Policies.

A useful meeting was held with SNH Francesca Osowska and Sally Thomas on Biodiversity and its future funding in March. SEFF had met HLF at UK and Scottish levels on the recent consultation. SEFF would commission a video to promote the need for funding support for nature with UK foundations.

The meeting noted that the guidance on Co-optees did not apply to the proposed advisory group for the Economics Group project, though the Group should **exchange a Terms of Reference (Action: Economics Group)** at the start.

2. Brexit Recap and Next Steps

Daphne recapped on the situation re the WM Withdrawal Bill, and consequent decision by Scotland (and also Wales) to develop its Continuity Bill. This includes good elements on principles and governance, and addresses the governance gaps, largely thanks to LINK engagement. Consultations on these are expected by September and will happen regardless of status of the contested Continuity Bill.

The First Minister’s Roundtable on the future relationship of Scotland and the EU asked a subgroup to commission a report on the governance gap. This has been finalised by its members, including Lloyd Austin and Jonny Hughes, due to be published in May. It will be part of the September consultation. Overall there has been good progress on environmental elements. There is a possible committment to a new Environment Act, though we are unsure yet whether this will be just a policy statement, as M. Gove was to publish a consultation that day. This relates to England only, and will be factored into our response. We will review it in a positive way, and speak to Scottish Government about it, and not engage as LINK with that consultation. The Withdrawal Bill, now in the HoL, has had some amendments on environmental safeguards accepted. On UK wide relationships, Wales and Scotland are working jointly on a paper; we need to understand that better. Additionally there is a bill on Trade, going through the Legislative Consent Motion to which we gave evidence; a WM Bill on agriculture for England and Wales – and not much of policy discussion in Scotland yet on the future of agriculture - a WM white paper on fisheries which we are following from the Devolution point of view, consultation expected later this year.

Helen T thanked Daphne and the Governance Group for all this work, noting that even since the April PSR there had been lots of changes. She reported on a meeting Ramblers had with Roseanna Cunningham, who had been concerned about UK NGOs not understanding the devolved context, and could the meeting advise on such issues as agriculture, how we operate in the context of nothing from the Scottish Government to respond too.

Daphne responded that this reaction from the Minister is not uncommon, has come up a few times, and it is fair to say that some UK NGOs do not always understand the devolved context. When Gove first came in there was a backlash from the devolved governments, big disagreement on the frameworks, with civil servants having conducted an exercise, and not needing UK frameworks for most things, and the fact that shorthand is difficult, saying UK when its relevant to England only. We have tried to engage on agriculture in Scotland, eg the joint letter on climate and agriculture which has created some discussion in Scottish Government. Similarly the results from our polling on agriculture, seeing the sensitivities of the devolution settlement within it. At the moment there is no big Scottish exercise on agriculture. The Ag Champions have yet to report, looking to issue a proposals paper.

Sam noted that we need to be mindful of the shifting UK narrative. In Scotland, there is not the political acceptance of the EU exit outcome. Amongst the eNGOs debate, nuggets of gold that may come to something, we need to find the confidence to put them forward without coming up against the shield of the devolution settlement, when you can have a perfectly legitimate discussion about 4 country options. We need sufficiently robust positions that can ride through these constitutional objections. If broader than England, will be framework arrangements in practice. We may want far stronger foundations for environmental governance. We may be in position to be advocating common frameworks to Scottish Govt, and in order to do that we need to marshall our arguments. Re: Environment Bill, Gove has been very presumptuous about the Queens Speech, without Cabinet agreeing it first, now everyone is animated about what can go into it, dropping in biodiversity, air quality, climate change measures etc, making a bit of a leap, we need to understand on what basis what we want to go forward for the Scottish environment. We need to get our evidence for change sufficiently robust so that we can go into that space robustly, even when the Cab Sec is unhappy.

Daphne suggested that the way the debate is going forward in Wales, on the future of environmental ambitions, may be a bit more comfortable for Scottish Government. It is very hard to talk about this in a way that is not misunderstood politically.

Paul thought from the meeting with the Cab Sec, there is a worry that eNGOs are sanguine about or even complicit about a de facto re-reserving of powers. While we are being very careful with our language, is there more we can do to emphasise our neutrality?

Daphne noted it was a big learning curve for everyone involved. Part of the problem is that all have not been using their language on devolution. We need to accept, and GUK needs to accept, that the devolution settlement is a bottom up approach. The subtleties are lost when you say UK frameworks, because of the actions of the UK Govt, the power imbalance, etc.

Calum thanked Daphne for all of this work. In the shifting sands the important thing for him is the nomenclature used, eg UK, and getting it mixed up with the UK Govt, that single thing. Truly UK thinking is about the four-country approach; he understands the difficulties of getting colleagues to understand UK devolution; the Scottish Govt’s nervousness, the sunset clause in the case of fisheries where in case of disagreement, the UK Govt has the final say. In practical terms a recent RSPB and WWF paper on Fisheries tried to address this.

Sam noted that re: next week’s Holyrood vote on the LCM, if not consented (as expected) and Wm dismisses the Scottish Parliament, this will become more toxic, and we will need to reassert our strongly held view that the devolution settlement holds. He suggested a clear short statement should be on our website, to have as a reference point, that there is no attempt on LINK’s part to undermine the devolution settlement, that we are clearly on the same page as most of the parties. We should do that and be prepared for what might pan out.

Helen T reminded the meeting that in 1997 LINK supported Devolution (Yes, Yes) recognising the advantages for the environment. *Note: Jen subsequently circulated the relevant documents.*

Daphne has liaised with WCL on its submissions on the Agriculture Bill in relation, to continue to maintain clarity. She agreed the statement would be useful. Paul noted that some UK colleagues believe that devolution has not been good for the environment, so it’s a very central point. Maybe we are not so neutral. Daphne replied we are not. We support the devolution settlement; we have always said ‘consent’. Calum noted that on fisheries they use the sacrosanctity of the devolution settlement.

Sam said that the climate in which it has happened has changed, if UK Fisheries bill has scope to overlap with devolved issues, going forward it doesn’t look so cooperative as in has been on fisheries, it will be very different. If the UK Bill is excellent, we have to be mindful of so many things. We should not be held back by leaving issues to England only, where it is better that issues are considered at UK level. Craig has had similar discussion within Buglife, will be guided on what is best environmentally. All involved in UK bodies should continue to make the devolution points. There are nuances, and carefulness needed, and the solutions are about how we explain it, which Mark L will help us with. Mark noted that it is interesting others trying to use the environment for their own purposes, eg that environmentalists now see Brexit is a good idea. His two comments on the LCM are 1) it is important we distinguish between matters which are reserved except for certain aspects, and those which Scottish Parliament has total responsibility and 2), to bear in mind the long-term arrangements, not what particular Ministers are saying at any one time.

Calum: on the fisheries bill this could only work if Scottish Ministers could set strategic directions for fisheries, which it can under the CFP.

Daphne: marine planning, where UK ministers allowed Scottish ministers flexibility on reserved issues to do with marine planning, we can see where things are possible where there is confidence and trust.

Sam: With all these bills in process and planned, where we need to be mindful that where there are environmental wins on the back of UK bills we should be building on that platform. At the moment England is on the front foot. We need to ensure Scottish agriculture is not worse off in comparison.

Bruce: payment for public goods. We know it’s not Gove’s idea.
Daphne: We have couched it in terms of the Scottish Good Food Nation Strategy. The Food and Farming subgroup has a series of workshops planned over the summer; from our side we are working on that as well.

Diarmid: our distinctness goes way back beyond 1997. On natural heritage assets, we are the ecological superpower, we have a huge responsibility for these assets. We have been doing this in relation to the CAP settlement, share of ecosystem services, not to put CAP funding onto a Barnett formula equivalent. Calum agreed this point is fundamental.

Paul: we could be more on front foot by making these statements, and saying that on certain areas there must be UK wide cooperation, animal welfare, INNS, where you must have cooperation within trading partners or you cannot have biosecurity Certain areas where it is really logical, where we should demand this. Daphne noted that Scottish Govt is not saying no to this.

**Actions: JA look back to what we said in 1997; DV coordinate production of short statement for the website**

3. The Broader political context
Political Strategy Report and horizons: Daphne introduced it. We had some really good wins. Support of Green MSPs for the budget realised £200k for nature conservation MPAs. The wider enquiry about Principles in the Continuity Bill by the ECCLR Ctte will be useful for the future. The joint letter on farming, opens doors. Useful findings on the agriculture polling work. The e-action on planning. The Forestry bill and the new strategy that is forthcoming. At same time challenges and opportunities. Our longstanding ask for Environmental Courts: at the moment there is an all party motion on EC, which we expect to pass. Also need to look at biodiversity post 2020 ambitions: what is not happening that should be. Recently had talk with Scottish Government about renewing efforts on the Land Use Strategy, which should not be an opportunity for watering down commitments on protected areas. Interesting on the Parliamentary numbers situation, with SNP not having a majority, there have been concessions, eg Greens on the budget. Opposition parties are starting to cooperate more to defeat government, and gearing up for next elections. This happened with the forestry bill, Scottish Govt felt under siege. We were contacted often to give our support as LINK to something the government wanted to see, and which we could not as we did not have a LINK position. It has launched a £6m initiative, *Scotland is now*, we need to put environment in there. And beneath the surface, the biodiversity funding issue and some crucial decisions that Govt is minded or not minded to take, on Coul Links, and Ramsar sites. They don’t want to be seen as anti-development, and rather than looking at right development in the right place, seem to be open to everything in practice.

Questions and comments included -

Calum: Impressive work on the Continuity Bill in particular. On Coul Links, the degree to which advice from SNH hampers the Govt’s desires? Aedán said that SNH has been increasingly reluctant to speak out against economic development. Bad news on Strathy South windfarm, will make SNH even less keen to give the good advice. RSPB is considering the wider strategic issue on how to bolster up SNH, where their views get taken into account. Sarah echoed that, and gave the example of where SNH are trying to put scientific advice in place on the west coast, they are under a lot of pressure from Marine Scotland. This is being found out via FoI, and taking up a lot of time, and good to have a discussion about it.

Bruce: it’s very important that we consistently hold Govt to account on its European standards. Too late for Strathy. Not much that can be done, links to the offshore judicial review, that Ministers did not put enough weight on the advice before they overruled it. Up to Minister’s discretion. Suggests that we struggle to push it at the moment, when Govt discretion trumps. Paul’s impression is that the weight given to SNH’s advice is the lightest it’s ever been. At the meeting with SNH we raised the point about SNH moving away from biodiversity, and CEO’s wish to have clear red lines, so we may be seeing more determination. Some sort of strategic advocacy around that issue, so that elected officials are not so ready to ignore its advice. Helen flagged that two other applications were turned down on the same day, so possibly a numbers issue. The Landscape subgroup met SNH recently. Landscape is no longer mentioned in its Corporate Strategy, replaced by Place-making. The Subgroup is having the discussion about when do you stand up and say No. On Coul Links, Helen complained to SNH because their objection made no mention of the landscape qualities and impacts on access. Response was that they were not nationally designated, so no comment. When Mike Cantley started and was asking at last year’s dinner what SNH should do we said Be bold!

Bruce: for those of us that have members this is a problem, they get angry at us because SNH is toothless.

Beryl: on hilltracks, some of those we look at have been commented on by SNH and SEPA and SEPAs are stronger.

Phoebe: relevance of the purpose statement in the National Performance Framework, and its influence on the way public bodies interpret their roles and if that is something we should be trying more to get changed. Now tweaking the Purpose Statement but not removing economic growth. Possible to get a joint letter about that, given that the joint briefing had quite a wide sign up. Should we repeat that to get wider support?

Mark: mileage at some stage at looking at all of the agencies and see whether there are things that can be done to strengthen their powers, and if necessary promote some sort of legislation to give a much stronger underpinning. At the moment we are in good place in terms of parliamentary numbers. Daphne has asked this of members of the Brexit subgroup, on issues that their orgs are aware of - best practice, worst practice.

Jen: aware that over a decade we have been concerned at SNH being downtrodden, in part Govt’s ploy. Mark’s suggestion might be part of a more objective way, to consider as a piece of work for a consultant, under the auspices of the Governance Group.

Shelia: RSPB did work a couple of years ago, looking at where the pressures are and concluded they have the powers but not using them. Sepa is getting better, but SNH is not using what they have got. Giving them more powers is not necessary the way.

Daphne: if Parliament asks it of them, would that be useful? And why they are constantly accepting cuts. If we did piece of work it could be about the failure of using their powers.

Aedán: seems that SNH is cowering under pressure from Govt, rather than considering themselves an arms-length agency. Seeing their role as furthering economic development, rather than nature conservation. RPSB has raised it with them, the issue being that others don’t see themselves as organisations to further the environment, so it reduces the environmental voice. Something about giving them some more protection. They are not protected from govt and powers within certain portfolios. SEPA is better at it, are much firmer. A bit of a review on its governance, and who they are responsible to.

Diarmid: broader context, also HES supposed to give rounded view of development. HES had been core civil service, then a public agency. Getting lot of feedback now from local authorities, that they have softened a lot of objections. The reluctance to use the word ‘object’, something in common about how regulators express themselves, and with Brexit, losing our super national backstop. We need it to become stronger.

Paul. Related is that part of output of Cab Sec meeting, the funding crisis for biodiversity. She seemed surprised that SNH have not the money for things that should be done, so she asked us to provide examples. RSPB will do this, and ideas from others are welcome. It’s a rough advocacy ask, the internal culture is problematic, they don’t like doing things. In organising the event on 6 June, senior management tried to overturn the agreement by the Committee on speakers.

Bruce: on SNH having to take account of economic factors, there is ignorance on where we are at on biodiversity duty. VisitScotland’s outrageous letter to Highland Council citing the brilliance of the Coul Links proposals. Seeking more pressure on biodiversity duty for other orgs. These points were made in LINK’s submission on the biodiversity to the Scrutiny Committee.

Helen: When *Governance Matters* was published, talked about lack of scrutiny, and Mark’s point about looking at all the regulatory agencies, all need scrutiny, not just SNH. The House of Lords did similar exercise and slated it. Possible to outsource?

Mark: if we can raise the question, perhaps the Scottish Parliament Committee could do the work initially.

Useful discussion. We could make a board approach to VisitScotland.

Emilie: Tourism is coming up more in context of MPAs, also on the x party group for recreational boating etc, year of the coast in 2020. Internal thought to try and work with that group and VS in terms of getting some target goals of sustainable tourism.

Sarah, raised tourism with the Cab Sec in general terms, and in meeting with David Miller, that would be a good example for Daphne’s good and bad practice.

Helen: £6m into rural tourism infrastructure, realising it’s a golden goose.

Paul: at SNH meeting discussed the need to think of novel sources of income for biodiversity. Scotland is trading on its green reputation. It is normal for other parts of the world that tourism taxes help pay for the maintenance of the resource.

Bruce: forum for natural capital has done some thinking on it. Met some operators, were comfortable for changing extra. Reception from VS and Scottish Tourism Alliance was negative., thought it would be a real threat. Worth revisiting.

Aedán: cultural thing about increasing fees and taxes, cannot risk anything perceived as a barrier to economic developments. If they saw there was support for it, may be more likely to go for it.

3.1 Other issues

a. Maximising benefit from Lloyd Austin’s EEB board membership and how to use that more in terms of offering up Scottish success stories or things we would want to use him for. Noted that we could highlight the links we are keeping within Europe. Also scope to work with the environmental lobby within the rest of the EU, so that the final Brexit agreement maintains high standards here, during the lengthy transition arrangements. LINK groups and subgroups to bear in mind that EEB has many groups including marine and fisheries, agriculture, circular economy with which to liaise.

b. LINK board recently done evaluation on last 6 months activity. Jen summarised the findings. Feedback from groups is a sense that that advocacy is being more listened too, and, as Daphne already covered in the PSR, some is being acted upon. There is traction in some areas and in other areas we are not making much progress. Language in the KPIs report is ‘good and improving’, and most areas are ‘good and improving’. Not uniformly and not across all areas. And as Paul remarked at Board, we may be doing well as LINK and the environment is still being thrashed. Thanks to all conveners you for giving it attention. At the end of this Corporate Strategy period we will be able to look at the trends, and get more of a feel for how we are doing. Observations: Bruce felt our advocacy has come on tremendously, particularly on the Brexit process.

c. Circular Economy work ahead: Matthew would like to know if there is going to be a crossover with existing groups and the circular economy. Phoebe explained that the new funded project, A Circular Economy for a Fairer Footprint, is in a scoping phase to determine the focus that the work will take. One strand will be the Circular Economy bill, if it materialises, and its measures, and in parallel, what are the gains if it does not materialise. The work will give us more expertise where there are other opportunities for legislative or policy progress to be make, like the Wildlife Act or the climate change Act. Phoebe has emailed all about it, and thanked all who responded. Phoebe had summarised these on the flip chart and asked people to add more over lunch if desired.

We will never get a complete CE, but there are elements which can improve outcomes, some to reduce harmful emissions. One of the Sust Dev Goals is closely tied to the CE. Work on landscape scale conservation and rewilding has been shown to engender small scale nature based economic benefits. Nitrogen budget, and phosphorus and carbon budgets, and making better use of by products, biodegradable wrapping, banning horticultural peat extraction and alternatives; end of life for wind turbines; integrated pest management as essential for reducing use of pesticides; promoting natural solutions to flooding and erosions; have you got the bottle campaign is an obvious example, and marine litter campaigns; natural capital work targeting business to focus on its asset base and looking at stocks rather than flows, important in relation to it.

Paul: Finding ways for people to contribute to ecosystem restoration.
Bruce: more part of a wider payment for the ecosystem services debate.

Tourism, tax is one of the things. Fiscal drivers, no reason why not to put them in.

Beryl: one of the parts is to develop industries and workers into upscaling things. Also what to do with obsolete machinery and adapting them for new uses.

Some members are working on decommissioning. Bruce felt this would be complicated in that particular context (benefits of keeping rigs in place) and we would never get agreement within LINK on it, not to say we would not make progress is if we did talk about it. And helping to facilitate the flow of materials back into the economy. Where does the money go, is it just back into the pockets of business or to the public purse. Materials stay in the system at the highest value. Bringing it into straight economics, how to ensure the bond money comes back to the public purse and not to the business. We will be learning more about the subject within the project.

d. NEN and where is it going: Craig, we did a lot of work to influence SNH’s statement, they took all of our concerns on board, that was great, and workshop in September 2017 held, and all quiet afterwards. Sticking point is Govt does not want anything that they will be bound to. SNH took the shared vision to officials, and they did not like the words ‘material consideration’ in planning, in terms of urban areas. Feeling is there may be flexibility around that in LINK, may be ways round it that we can promote, and the post 2020 strategy could be one such. SNH’s action plan on the back of it, these were tiny. The other sticking point was marine. If it doesn’t include marine it will not wash, politically, so have to figure out a way to deal with it. Difference is that for marine it has a legal basis. Need to join them up to show it can be done. SNH coloured in the map to say it is done with protected areas, not the join up. Duty in the Marine Act includes sites with intertidal component. If the network itself if not well managed, we will have problems. It is a way to get across the idea that protected areas in themselves are the backbone, but not enough by themselves, need appropriate measures with the interconnected land. Getting some of the SBS groups to come together to progress it. Useful in wider conversations about it to refer to the LUS. It represents the ecological strands of what we want delivered within the LUS. Could be making it more real to Govt. LINK has two places on the protected areas working group, will share representation on it, and our reps need to be pressing these points. Potentially there are problems, need to reconvene the small group to think about whether we want to put it forward into the NPF, or post 2020 infrastructure. Katriona Carmichael (at meeting with SGovt) mentioned picking it up in the NPF. When we are reconfiguring, bear that in mind.

**Action: CMc to arrange discussion morning of 24 May, adjoining the Wildlife Subgroup meeting**

e. Our post 2020 strategy. We have not come up with the asks, and increasing realisation we are half way through from 2015 to 2020, and not making the desired progress, what more we can do until 2020 and then beyond. We have had the March discussion with SNH and they are considering it. Panel say we are losing species a lot faster, lot of evidence out there, evidence we are putting forward in context of the Climate bill. Want us to look back, look at our asks, and build up a strong campaign so we are ready to advocate very strongly with Govt.

We raised this with Ian Jardine, and signals are that the door is now open to us. There has been thinking behind closed doors as to what will happen post 2020. The bold ambition to have a co-branded iteration of the next strategy from the off, which is not going to happen without discussion. We will follow up in our letter to the Cab Sec and with Bridget Campbell. We are saying we want the 6 June conference to be the relaunch. Speaking to Scottish Parliament putting biodiversity into their new work programme. When it is finalised in June, we will ask them to pick up on biodiversity more strongly.

3.2 Update on what we will be asking of the next Programme for Govt, and meeting was invited to suggest more:

We have some clear things in terms of Brexit, Environment Act and principles and the governance gap; forestry strategy, biodiversity post 2020; NEN, Licencing, something on the LUS, Agriculture and fisheries post Brexit, and aquaculture post inquiry. Circular Economy white paper;

Calum: Inshore Fisheries bill, need to be commitment to something that delivers ecosystem based fisheries management. Open to discussion post clause 11.

Beryl: Wildlife crime obligations. Govt thinks they have met the manifesto obligations, committed more funding. Our ask is why these things do not help us. Daphne noted the need for very clear arguments, if putting something in the PfG.

Something on Landscape, as things are back to square 1, no political will at all. For further discussions.

4. Lobbying legislation and compliance by LINK as a network

Lisa outlined LINK’s approach to the lobbying register, referring to the [briefing](http://www.scotlink.org/resources/tool-kit/guidelines/) on the website. The register has been in force for 2 months, is a searchable record. MSPs are covered, and some advisors, the permanent secretary, face to face meetings and video though not phone calls, and not covering constituency issues, and not where a government official has approached you for the meeting. Orgs with less than 10 FTE are exempt, though not LINK as it is a representative body. We only have to do what paid staff do, but decided to go over and above, to register where members are advocating a LINK position. We might review as time goes on. Email information@scotlink.org with returns. Example, if RSPB is in a meeting with Daphne and an MSP, RSPB and LINK will make returns. Also asking others who are not registered to provide returns, if talking purely about a LINK position on their own. If Daphne is there, that info will come from her, though let us know if no LINK staff member is involved. Don’t worry aobut snowing us under. We will cope!

There was a big thanks to Lisa for organising a fantastic SEW reception.

After lunch we were joined by Dilraj Watson, shortly to join the Advocacy team. Dilraj introduced herself. She has a communities background, land for the last 6 years has been working on the climate challenge programme, hoping to bring in climate skills and knowledge to this role.

5. Forward work programme

The aim was to look at it with a realistic eye, and amend anything no longer relevant, or missing from it. Some groups are further ahead than others in the planning.

Economics: scoping will take the first 4 months, and will be recruiting an advisory group to the project. Happy that its realistic and achievable.

Governance: accurate. The two big things are all of the Brexit fallout, and Governance Matters related to that principle, continuity bills, and the work of the Legal Strategy subgroup, looking at environmental justice, and issues and mechanism relating, eg environmental courts, and potential establishment of an environmental rights centre. And the work agreed this morning. Always welcome other members. Mary Church leading that subgroup was at court today, on Ineos’ challenge to the fracking ban. FoES role in intervening in this case relates to the issues that the subgroup is looking at in terms of access to the courts, Aarhus, justice etc, very interesting.

Land Group: 3 subgroups. Building stronger links with the Land Commission, making sure that they don’t lose sight of how land is managed. And some of the larger NGOs may be in firing line on public benefits. Been some positive move on LUS, land commission, and SG named someone responsible, Katriona Carmichael, will be liaising on specific actions to take that forward.

Wildlife: Talked a lot of what the subgroup is up to in Daphne’s update. What is written is slightly out of date, focus is turning towards post 2020 mechanisms. New co-convenor, Liz Ferrell. Main focus is biodiversity post 2020 and will looking at advocacy plan and campaign. On Species champions, Calum Langdale is doing a great job, establishing a campaign over summer recess to get them all out and about. Biodiversity duty, waiting to hear from the cttee. Need to look at funding for Calum’s post beyond November. Conscious that there are things we could be doing on Freshwater if we had time. Tom Leatherland a potential resource. Craig to think further.

Marine: Calum/Sarah, have been anticipating next tranche of management measures for fisheries in inshore MPAs, expect consultation soon. Been well supported by Emilie and previously by Esther too, consultation was delayed for a long time. Another piece of work, protection of priorty marine features beyond MPAs. For plans going forward mindful of Emilie’s capacity, focus is on advocacy and engagement around MPA management, and organising Sea Scotland conference, now in its 3rd year. Other areas are member led. Major aquaculture enquiry in place, looking to be geared up as a subgroup to what the REC cttee conclusion is in response to the ECCLR report. Member led. And consultation on next 4 nature conservation MPA consultation being brought forward. Another big piece of the MPA network coming into place. helping to prepare for that and pulling in funding from the MPA fighting fund. Doing some technical work with Charlotte Hopkin, formerly LINK on detailed criteria work for assessment of MPA effectiveness and coherence. In final stages of the Sea Floor Integrity report, and possible launch event. Organising a trip to St Abbs as part of 100 days challenge. And also the fisheries and Brexit stuff.

Planning: been very busy on the Bill. At Stage 1 now, expect the stage 1 report next week. Of wider relevance at top level for better join up between policies, been getting some reasonable positive responses. The Planning bill looks to get rid of regional planning, looking for that to be reinstated, and to build in regional land use planning. Getting some positive responses. Pushing for a statutory basis for a mitigation hierarchy, and to use the NEN as a guide that that might happen. Have some climate asks, with SCCS. And ERA, quite a lot of appetite in some of the other parties. If we can get some indication that a shift is required, maybe some progress. Either levelling up or a restriction in developers right of appeal. Wait and see what the committees report is next week. Timetable - expecting things to be tied up by September. There will be a Main Issues Report. Also trying to get a statutory purpose for planning for sustainable development; and to get the NPF to link up better the national marine plan. And reverse the link between the economic strategy and the NPF. Hard going, but will keep on at that for long game. Also concern about centralisation. Overall flavour are about centralisation, and get more housing delivered. Most obvious example of this centralising agenda, is because it enables govt to be smaller, and cutting consultation requirements in half. Getting rid of regional planning, getting rid of opportunities for engagement, and not considering any right of appeal too. Opps for us to make some progress on them. Saying they will introduce ties into community planning which is not about communities or planning - a distraction. Saying there will be more front loading. Could be worth talking to the Land Commission about that. Connections are not as good as they could be. Issues around planning consent if you are not an owner, and often it is a more important factor, recognition that they need to come together more. Daphne, PD is preparing an open letter to govt about the issue of appeals, which some of our members may want to sign up. Will be pursuing the results of the e-action. Lots of issues, our summary briefing is 8 pages long!

Deer: rumour of new deer legislation to try to achieve some of the issues not dealt with last time. Not been much activity since setting up of the Independent Panel. They will be engaged in the forestry strategy.

Food and Farming: we issued results of the polling last week, very good conclusions over 75% of people supporting tie into climate and wildlife. Pitched to Scotsman, complemented by an editorial., and another article by James Hutton Institute. A good point to refocus the discussion on agriculture. Will distribute it to MSPs with an ask to go speak to them. Govt is happy with results of poll and the wording of it. Vice president of NFUS wrote an on-message blog. Well placed article in response to the polling work. most radical doc the NFUS has produced, not what we want but is on the right lines. Trying to make argument with them jointly on the capacity of Scotland to make most contribution to ecosystem services, so we need more resources. Anna doing great job to get dates for workshops to get the stakeholders together to do Govt’s job for them and work out what we all want policy to be. Hearing nothing from Govt on their vision other than powers and money. Daphne, need for them to wake up, and we know that everyone has been putting across the same message, we need policy for Scotland. Public funding for public goods. NFUS narrative on productive farming. There will be a fight over what is public goods, subsidised barley for whisky industry or cheap beef. Budget needs to be there in order to do anything. Is a lot of confusion around setaside, and management, and if there is money for farmers to do nothing, versus the effort needed to ensure land fulfils it ecosystem services potential. The Welsh govt is looking into the public goods and production is not part of it. Economic definition is straightforward and easy to understand. We would tinker with that in context of the Good Food Nation bill. Shortening the supply chains, going into schools, education. Welsh Cab Sec’s speech on public goods, is worth quoting to the Scottish govt. Highlands and islands agriculture group, which includes the local authorities, and RSBP are publishing a report on Monday about agriculture and the post Brexit challenge. Fergus Ewing will attend the launch. May be another nudge to Govt.

Hilltracks: Still accurate. Main thing is that consultant’s report will be held back for publication until September, and talking to various member orgs and others over the summer. Will continue monitoring of key LAs, aim is still to push for change in the legislation. Looking at alternative hooks, rights and responsibilities, LUS, and other strands for opportunities to achieve our aims. Winds are for more permitted development, rather than less.

Landscape: still accurate. In Limbo. People perceive landscape protection as against economic development. Have met with SNH who updated us on decommissioning of windfarms, and Pete Rawcliffe and Simon Brooks.

Wildlife Crime: most of work is done by Ian Thomson and Eddie Palmer. Liz Ferrell also really useful. Govt’s report annoyed us a lot, inaccuracies, no prior consultation. Have sought more contact with Policescotland and Crown Office for next time round. Daphne helping made a huge difference. Would like more interest and support from the wider membership. Is quite a narrow field. Eddie had good meeting with new people in the Police, problem is the wildlife crime officers change, the structures are not satisfactory. New DC working on wildlife crime liaison, things are looking more promising. Bruce added that some member orgs were invited to mountain hare meeting after the First Minister’s comments. Some interesting data pointing to 1990s study on vector for louping virus. Govt says it’s not enough info for them to take action on yet. Will be published by journal of applied ecology. Govt needs some convincing. Had 3 meetings on hares, one with conservationists, with animal welfare and gamekeepers.

Woodland: Been very active during the passage of the bill. Core team within the group WTS, RSPB and SWT, and looking to expand that. Alistair Whyte wants to be engaged, so great. Would like more members joining in. Now working on the Scottish Forestry Strategy, had workshop session last month with access and agriculture contributing. If you have a view as to how it might work contact Charles. He will be responding to those attending the workshop.

Strategic approach to environmental policy: Daphne added that Govt has not addressed. Over the summer we could be looking at where the issues are not being addressed, to find narratives where we can be speaking to govt on it. Lloyd, issue of long terms strategic approach, is opportunity to talk about cross sectoral things and how govt does not appear to be making progress on specific areas. We could compile a host of individual issues where their action does not meet their rhetoric. Ask how the policy is going to influence the decisions that they take. Is a potential opportunity getting overshadowed by the Brexit process. Officials Ian Jardine and Kate McDermot Thomson, are inundated by Brexit, asking questions about when and how, and how it’s going to influence decisions. Aedán flagged it’s an issue about prioritising and resourcing. Defra getting more resourcing, not reflected in Scotland, should be extra Barnett money coming to Scotland, so where is it going?

Campaigns and events schedules, any concerns: Noted that the 100-day challenge will be virtual launch. And 100 days later a lunchtime event in the Parliament. Hilltracks launching report 10 September, though not talked yet about an event.

Integration - are the groups properly joining up: Are landscape and LUS joining up? It involves many of the same people, John, Helen, Diarmid. If we are starting to take an active role, presumably we want landscape in there. Wildlife links are mainly with the Species Champions, other groups and subgroups to using them. You can go to the organisation that is managing each species. Calum Langdale has explained to people how to use them, and been to some of the other groups’ meetings and is spotting opportunities. Work on climate change was good at joining things up as a natural bridge; going forward there is some comms/briefing work on climate to be done mainly around agriculture, and when the bill comes, around amendments; LINK’s briefing for Earth hour covered theme of climate and biodiversity, brought a lot of strands together, will inform the Ag briefing; fact sheets for Species Champions and follow up to the letter on farming will cover climate.

6. Member updates

Buglife: EU going to ban 3 neonics completely. Only for flowering crops, will still be used in greenhouses, and flea treatments for pet, potentially biggest sources of neonics in the environment. Thanks to all. On back of that, is a national pollinator monitoring scheme. It has two levels, systematic looking at a square metre, and also a citizen science element. Dead easy to do, the more information we get the better we can inform protections.

Ramblers**:** campaign called Out There with 3 stands to it. Reducing barriers to the outdoors. Survey, apart from weather and time, is lack of paths, and not knowing where they can go. Young people had even less of an idea. Putting some money into a project for a path near Achiltibuie. And have a member putting in a path from Inverness to John O Groats. Supporting members doing that. And paths on maps, no requirement to do it in Scotland, so have commissioned some research to find out what the barriers are, feel it would reduce barriers if people could see paths are there.

WCD: Most time spent on fisheries bycatch. Found out we have funds from EU for whale entanglements in Scotland, in static creel lines is an issue for some species. Working with SNH and fisheries associations, and others asking fishermen about their experiences, looking at historic situation and what solutions might be. Almost half of stranded minkes show signs of entanglement. It is quite a big project. At UK level campaigning for better bycatch measures. Have a commitment from the fisheries minister to develop a better bycatch strategy. Marine Scotland is leading on some aspects, and working with other groups through Greener UK. Want to ensure that gains for one species equal gains for others, rather than at their expense.

RSPB: Forestry, been working through finishing internal policy position on woodland expansion at UK level. Where trees will be going. Long and wordy. And want to support a more spatial approach. Want to link to LUS and NEN. Many other things mentioned earlier. Fisheries, Alex is also involved with EU fisheries and GUK. Also INNS work, at GB INNS strategy. Which Paul is on. Gave evidence to HoL on post EU policy, keeping up pressure on that, and also working on getting govt and agencies to put more effort into eradication projects. Some Life bids with partners coming up. An important area. Islands bill, flows from the INNS work, and bill is driven from rhetoric of community empowerment, without giving any actual powers. Centre piece is that Govt will have to produce an islands plan, all their policies that affect islands, and initially was about economics and inhabited islands. Now includes all islands and natural heritage is also an objective. This will set up a process whereby there will be a follow on strategy, which is an opportunity to feed in what we want to see. Crown Estates Bill. RSPB and NTS, with some set views, about sustainable development duties to apply and other generics. Protected areas week, series of blogs week of 21 May, to celebrate natura sites. Light touch thing. Is big in Spain. Will see how it goes for next year. Some scope to get Scottish Govt support for it, supports their EU commitments.

SWT: through Forum for Natural Capital commissioned work through Stirling council on its city region deal, return on investment, shows what the year on year benefits would be from investing in natural capital assets. Will go on for quite a while. Stirling wants to major on being the greenest city. Not published yet. With CE and SLE, finished land based trial of natural capital protocol, better tools to make decisions on farms and estates. Hope to have something released at Highland Show and afterwards.

RZSS: through Scottish Wildcat Action presented a paper on domestic cats. Currently a petition about domestic cat ownership.

SWBG:consultation finished March. Expecting a debate in Parliament before summer recess. In lead up seeing a big anti- beaver media campaign, so countering that with facts on beaver benefits.

Plantlife: Alistair now in post doing a combo of Deborah’s and Davie’s roles. Keen to progress NEN type stuff, progress important plant areas, doing work on nitrogen, roadworks campaign, and big citizen science campaign. Survey and monitoring programme being started again. Real gaps in Scotland, will be looking to recruit people for that. Daphne suggested it would be great to work with your Species Champions to help recruitment.

SWLG: Capacity very low, tied up with governance things, that is why LINK is so great! Hoping to recruit more active volunteers next AGM.

7. MEETINGS AHEAD

ELUK federal network of the Links, will be having its conference on 2 & 3 October, focus is on the SDGs and how we are all doing against them. Looking to get the Ian Jardine equivalents down to speak about it.

Congress 30 August in Perth, tied in with Training day and UK eNGO heads meeting.

Next network meeting is on 12 December, also the AGM and the Festive Reception.

AW/LINK/15.5.18