LINK - Stakeholder Survey September-October 2015

Background

This stakeholder survey was designed to get an external perspective on LINK's past and future strategy. It was informed by the Members Survey, results of which were discussed at Board and Network Meetings in September. Compared with the Members Survey, it focused less on LINK processes and more on perceptions of LINK's achievements, engagement and influence.

Introduction

The survey was sent to a wide range of stakeholders, including the organisation's funders, Scottish Government, politicians, journalists and commentators, and other environmental organisations. It ran from 4th September to 9th October and attracted 12 responses. Respondents identified themselves in the following ways:

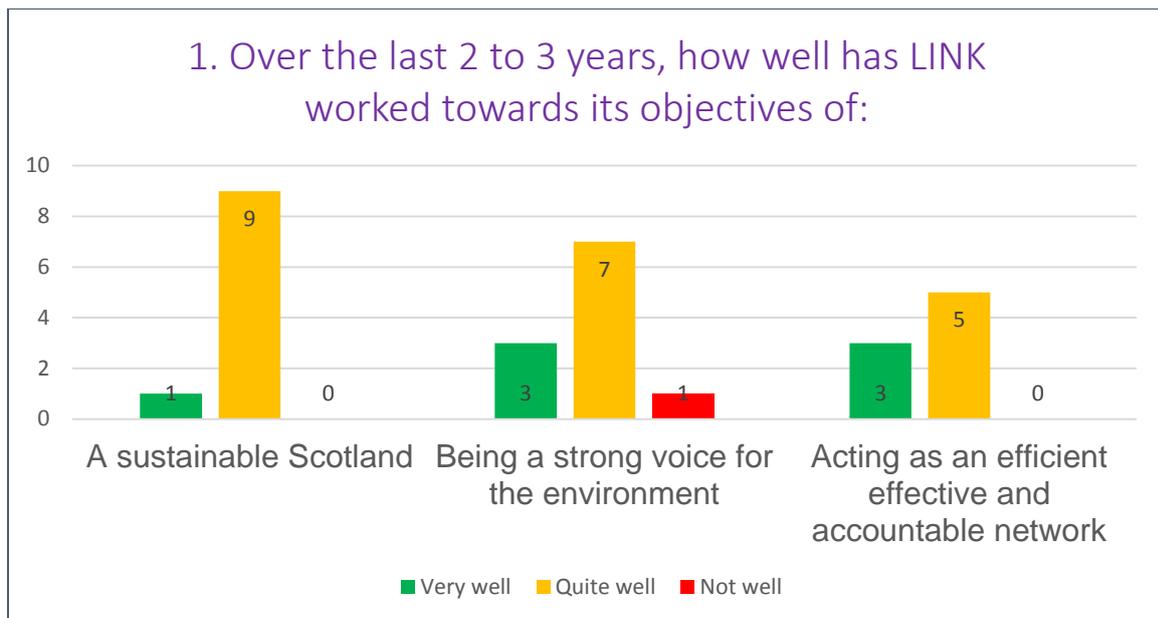| What is your relationship to LINK (tick all that apply)	
Public sector body	5
Third sector organisation	3
Local government	0
Funder	0
Civil Servant	1
Politician e.g. MP, MSP, councillor	1
Journalist/commentator	0
Other (please specify)	0
answered question	**9**

Eight people indicated how long they had known LINK, seven of these have known LINK for more than 4 years. Two respondents described their working relationship with LINK as 'always' productive; five said it was 'usually' productive; and one said it was 'sometimes' productive. Nobody classed it as 'seldom' or 'never' productive.

12 semi-structured telephone interviews were also carried out – there is a separate summary report on these. Four of the 12 interviewees also completed the survey, the other eight did not. In total therefore, the survey and interviews reached 20 unique stakeholders.

This paper primarily explores results from the survey, but makes reference to interview results where these provide interesting comparison.

Notes: *The survey was anonymous but allowed people to give permission for quotes to be used in this report. 11 out of 12 people gave this. However, only eight people identified their role or sector, so for consistency quotes have not been attributed. Round (brackets) in quotes are those used by respondents. Square [brackets] indicate where words have been inserted or replace for clarity [most commonly changing 'they' to 'LINK']. Ellipses…indicate where quotes have been edited for brevity.*

Prepared by
Graeme Reekie MA MBA Cmgr FCMI
Wren and Greyhound Limited October 2015

1. Over the last 2 to 3 years, how well has LINK worked towards its objectives of:

	Very well	Quite well	Not well
A sustainable Scotland	1	9	0
Being a strong voice for the environment	3	7	1
Acting as an efficient effective and accountable network	3	5	0

There were not enough responses to allow clear comparison with the same question in the Member Survey, but stakeholders were broadly less likely to rate LINK's work against the objectives 'Very well'. Their comments identified some important questions which were then explored in more depth during interviews:

Comments

- *'I think LINK is hugely important - but if I'm looking for progressive thinking on environmental issues I tend to find that in academic circles, or through particular individuals - very rarely via LINK (and component bodies). Many parts of LINK have become part of the establishment. That's a little disappointing.'*

- *'I think the headline achievements are primarily legislative, but I think the implementation of environmental protection and influencing spending decisions by the Scottish Government, local councils and businesses generally is much less impressive.'*

- *'LINK could be a mechanism for communicating solutions, but I don't see that happening much. It is also the case that the environment movement could make its voice heard in issues which are not core "environment" - for example health or social justice.'*

2. LINK's main achievements in recent years
Three themes emerged:

- Marine planning and legislation (3 comments)
- Parliamentary influence (3 comments)
- Climate change (3 comments)

The first two of these achievements were also identified by members in the Member Survey. Five other achievements were listed which did not fall into clear themes. See Appendix One for comments in full.

3. The main challenges facing Scotland's environment in the next three years

Unlike the Member Survey (which asked members to identify three themes they wanted to *address* through LINK), no common themes emerged in response to this question, but see Appendix 2 for responses in full. However there was a thread of comments relating to *connections* (particularly between the environment and other areas of life and policy), which was explored more in stakeholder interviews.

4. Selecting the 'right' issues to work on, at the right time

Stakeholders generally felt LINK selects the right issues at the right time, with five people saying LINK 'sometimes' selects the right issues; three that it 'usually' does; and none that it 'always' or 'never' does.

Comments

- *'It would be worth doing an analysis of which issues Link has campaigned on and which it has been successful on.'*

- *'An example would be the silence on sustainable development at the point the world is agreeing new sustainable development goals.'*

- *'You need to avoid coming across as a (for want of a better phrase) middle class narrow interest group or a group that comes across as anti-development. Development isn't the main cause of biodiversity loss (land management is) and you need to stop obsessing about it. I think you should align yourself with the agenda of tackling the growing inequalities in our society and the role of green infrastructure in playing some part in addressing health inequalities.'*

The suggestions that LINK should be open to 'the right kind' of development and aligned to health and other agendas were explored further in stakeholder interviews.

5. The clarity, coherence and credibility of LINK's collective voice.

Only one of the nine people who answered this question gave an unqualified answer, that the collective voice is 'very important'. The other eight balanced this with a view that diversity has its place in promoting mature debate, informing organisations' policies and representing different voices. Two also noted that diversity also helps smaller organisations to get their voices heard, a similar topic to one in the Member Survey.

- *'At times it [LINK] might wish deliberately to promote diverse views in order to stimulate wider debate beyond its own ranks. Some members might find that*

hard to accept, but any unwillingness to consider the options is a sign of weakness not of strength.'

- *'If work can be done to share knowledge and ensure different organisations take account of others views in their policy making process then that would probably be a success.'*

- *'I think having broadly the same objectives is good, but there's no point in complete unanimity otherwise the distinctive views and expertise of different NGOs are blurred.'*

- *'It is tough when you are such a broad church, but obviously it helps to have a clear voice on certain issues. For example it seems there is a 'for' and 'anti' windfarm faction at the moment… [I would] suggest that you proactively come up with an alternative national strategy (on a map) to the Scottish Government strategy.'*

This last quote illustrates a broader point that came across in stakeholder interviews, that there is an increasing desire for LINK to play a role in presenting *solutions*, being progressive and proactive.

6. How successfully does LINK reach agreement on high-level principles and develop collective positions, accepting that members' views may diverge on the detail?

LINK generally achieves this balance quite well. As with Question 4 above, responses seem to indicate that LINK is more sensitive about how its values are perceived than it needs to be. Stakeholders recognise that finding consensus is not always easy but that LINK needs to deliver clear messages:

- *'LINK has always wrestled with this and has generally done well. There are times though when it has gone wrong. The fact that climate change issues have been seen in opposition to softer issues (landscape or recreation) is the sort of dogmatic debate that will turn off people who can see the validity of both arguments. Single interest looks increasingly simplistic. The environmental movement needs to set an agenda that allows for wider interests without ending up with short term or expedient decisions.'*

- *'Generally successfully, so don't wring your hands too much - rather focus on moving on and resourcing the messaging.'*

- *'It can be difficult for diverse organisations to reach agreement, and this can lead to the final 'message' being 'middle of the road'. But this is fine - the nature of co-operation is to find compromise. Individual organisations will always retain their own views, but when working together as Link there needs to be agreement.'*

7. How relevant is LINK to wider policy agendas like environmental and legal governance, social justice and the economy, if at all?

Six out of the nine stakeholders who responded felt that LINK does well at making environmental issues relevant to wider agendas and policy:

- *'Highly relevant - and LINK could do more to join with social agendas where there is a common interest, e.g. on climate change, health, environmental justice, natural capital.'*

- *'I think very - and you've managed to gain influence - or at least access to Scottish Government at quite a high level - well done!'*

The respondent who mentioned LINK's 'silence' on sustainable development (above) felt LINK could have more relevance to this agenda:

- *'Not as well as it should be...The narrative around sustainable development goals gave an open goal for civic Scotland to contribute - but it was Cifal and the UN who led this agenda in Scotland.'*

Two others didn't or couldn't comment on LINK in particular, but were supportive of the view that environmental issues underpin other areas of policy and life.

- '*Nature/environment is irrelevant unless it is attached to wider policy agendas. It is folly to separate nature from them…The environment is not somehow a 'separate' entity - people are inextricably bound up in it.'*

- *'The environmental sector in general needs to be addressing a much wider audience than just the environment. If the environment underpins our society, then we need to address a wide range of areas including economy and social justice.'*

In the interviews that followed, stakeholders were very much in agreement with this perspective, seeing the benefit of widening the relevance of environmental issues.

8. Influence on the direction of policy and decision making in Scotland

Five respondents thought that LINK does influence the direction of policy and decision making, while three were 'not sure'.

In the follow-up examples that people gave, climate change was the biggest single theme, with three comments. Two people felt that LINK had made a 'high level impact' or strengthened legislation, though one of these notes there is still a challenge in making 'detailed changes' to address it. Another felt that LINK's impact on climate change and loss of biodiversity was weaker than its influence on Marine Protected Areas.

The final example was about hill tracks:

- *'Hilltracks spring to mind. Although you didn't get everything you wanted there is now some element of control - you shouldn't give up on that campaign though.'*

In a comment that reflects a wider view that came across in interviews, one stakeholder observed that it is *'Hard to isolate the voice of LINK from the voices of its members.'* After the question about LINK's identity as a network and an organisation arose out of the Member Survey analysis, it is interesting to note that stakeholders clearly see LINK more as a network.

9. How does LINK stand up in comparison to other policy and membership bodies?

As with a similar question in the Member Survey, all six responses to this question were quite positive. However each of these quotes qualify this in different ways:

- *'Very well in many ways. Perhaps at times the sector doesn't seem to have modernized in taking views that are cross-sectoral in nature.'*

- *'More representative than SCVO. More effective than the Scottish Campaign on Welfare Reform (although they don't have dedicated resource). Arguably less effective than Stop Climate Chaos Scotland but SCCS has the benefit of being more focussed/single issue.'*

- *'Well, but not as efficiently as it might, or used to.'*

10. Balancing the roles of being a 'collaborator' with and 'critic' of policy and decision makers

Two respondents felt LINK 'strikes the right balance', three felt LINK 'is not critical enough' and two didn't know or were unsure. [Attributed quotes are given here due to their relevance to the question].

Comments

- *'LINK has been good in supporting public policies like on climate change and renewable energy, and on MPAs. LINK could say more about public funding for environment and how this contributes to social and economic objectives, and for the need for arm's length advice on environmental issues and for funding for supporting evidence. LINK could be more critical of action on sustainable transport...[and] intensive agriculture impacts.'* (Public sector body)

- *'I'd like to see more progressive thinking from LINK rather than perpetuating an establishment view.'* (Public sector body)

- *'Mostly strike the right balance - but you've got to get away from coming across as anti-development and being too precious about things like the green belt. You should be being really proactive and develop policies on things like the housing crisis and how to address it. You should really push community ownership and further land reform (I think you are) especially in the urban environment.' (Public sector body)*

Survey responses were more mixed than those that came across in interviews, where stakeholders were much more in agreement that LINK finds the right balance between collaboration and criticism. The most common views (that organisations have to be close enough to government to have influence; that there is a place for criticism in the right context) are echoed in the quotes in Question 10 below.

11. What role do you think environmental NGOs should play through their involvement in LINK?

- *'Depends what LINK is for. LINK bodies need to work with the network at a sufficiently senior level that LINK can make active and collaborative decisions even when some members are not wholly happy.'*

- *'The answer is probably a mix of everything. There is no point in simply being a critic; endless confrontation will achieve nothing for the environment. While there undoubtedly needs to be some sense of challenging government (and the sector?) there also has to be a role for a 'critical friend'.'*

- *'All of the above - but criticisms should be kept firmly behind closed doors.'*

12. Raising the profile – and understanding – of environmental issues and their relevance to people's lives

There are mixed opinions on LINK's media effectiveness, perhaps echoing a view from stakeholder interviews that LINK has a relatively low profile and media presence compared to its members. Comments, including those immediately below and in Question 12, identify an opportunity for LINK to take more of a lead in providing progressive responses to environmental challenges.

How would you rate LINK's media activity in raising the profile – and people's understanding – of environmental issues and their relevance to people's lives?
Very effective – 0
Quite effective - 3
Quite ineffective – 2
Ineffective - 1
Neither/not sure - 1

Comments

- *'The political environment has and is changing over the past year or so. Established NGOs - including many in LINKs membership - need to ensure they don't get left behind.'*

- *'Environment profile is similar, but the scope for being a medium for solutions is now bigger than ever - and there is a gap there.'*

- *'The environment is still seen as species, pollution and climate. Actually it is food, fulfilment and the future. LINK can't compete with the communications machines of its members and unless they all want to lose a bit of their invisibility for the greater good that will always be the case. That may not be the best outcome for the environment.'*

13. Is there anything else you would like to add or comment on as part of this survey of LINK's strategies and services?

Five comments were made: one repeated the call for LINK to be less 'anti-development' using very similar words and ideas to those they used in the quote in Q10 above. Another pointed out that the survey had made them realise they were not 'up to speed with LINK's priorities'. The other three comments were:

- *'It is a good time to review across the whole sector how collective action might be more effective. Despite LINK, the voices of the NGO environment sector is disparate and diverse. There is strength in that, but there is also weakness. There could be useful debate around that I suspect.'*

- *'We are facing unprecedented change over the next few years - opportunities as well as threats. We need to take a cold hard look at what works for the environment - and let go of dogma to arrive at an approach that is fit for the 21st Century and positioned to tackle the character of the problems we face now (not several decades ago)'*

- *'I would emphasize the importance of Link in developing connections across the UK with the other Link organisations. This is an area which should be developed more, and where we can all learn from one another.'*

The question of it being time for the environmental sector to review and modernise how it works was explored in more depth in stakeholder interviews.

Appendix 1 - **LINK achievements**

Q2. In your view, what are LINK's main achievements in recent years?

Achievement	Comments
Marine planning and legislation	**3**
Marine protected areas *Raising the profile of marine planning* *Strong marine legislation*	*Of which:* 1st choice: 0 2nd choice: 3 3rd choice: 0
Parliamentary influence	**3**
Input to parliamentary processes *Species champions (MSPs)* *Legislation*	*Of which:* 1st choice: 1 2nd choice: 1 3rd choice: 1
Climate change	**3**
Climate change targets *Raising awareness of climate change issues* *Strong climate legislation*	*Of which:* 1st choice: 2 2nd choice: 0 3rd choice: 1
Other	**5**
Hill tracks report / campaign *Working on the economy* *General advocacy on environmental issues* *Better coordination and lobbying across environmental NGOs* *Raising awareness of the benefits of nature*	

Respondent quotes given in full, with the exception of one person who withheld permission for quotes to be used and whose comments are therefore summarised or paraphrased.

Appendix 2 – Environmental challenges

To allow LINK to make comparisons and identify core challenges, Stakeholder Survey responses are given in full below, followed by Member Survey responses, also given in full for the first time.

Stakeholder Survey responses

What would you say are the main challenges facing Scotland's environment in the next three years?		
1st choice	**2nd choice**	**3rd choice**
Austerity and the attack on public services coupled with an unapologetic growth agenda.	Taking a more creative and less protectionist approach to conservation and environmental change	Re-engaging the public who can re-direct politicians.
Making the case for transformational social, environmental and economic change, moving beyond market solutions	Ensuring we tackle climate change by developing renewables/moving to a low carbon economy	
Relevance: people AND nature	Nature-based solutions	Over-exploitation of natural resources
Climate change		
Making the connection between economic and health spending is a major challenge.	As the Scottish Parliament gains more powers - especially taxation, there are dangers that we will not see environmental criteria influencing decisions.	Local decision making has largely been ignored by Link and that's where a lot of the important decisions which impact on our environment are made.
There is an issue around connecting the agendas in the 4 UK countries, in particular the relationship between Westminster and the devolved assemblies.		
Continuing biodiversity loss due to poor land and wildlife management (Red deer)	Embedding green infrastructure as an essential life support system for cities	Health / Environmental justice - access to open space
Renewables	Energy security	Marine policy implementation and kickback
Climate change	Transition to low carbon economy	Resource use and re-use

Member survey responses

When presenting survey responses to the September 2015 Network meeting, there was interest in what some of the categories mean, and the detail of comments within them. They are therefore presented here in full, using colour coding to indicate whether they were respondents first, second or third choice (green, orange and red respectively). Comments may appear in more than one category.

Environmental challenge
Land use – 14 comments
Strengthen protection for wild land, and reduce the threat from industrial scale wind turbines, and bulldozed tracks.
the rewilding agenda and the protection of landscape and wild land in Scotland
Land reform
Sustainable land use / land reform
Securing greater recognition and attention for landscape considerations in policy-making and decision-taking in Scotland (ongoing objective of Landscape Task Force).
Landscape policy
Strengthen protection from huge housing estates and the proposed New town in the Cairngorms National Park,
Re-establishing a broad-based forum, including public body representatives, to pursue this goal and securing wider sign-up to Scotland's Landscape Charter in either its present or an amended form
Land Use
Better protection for Green Belts
encouraging government to do a sound job of land reform in terms of the future understanding of how land should be managed to deliver a positively thriving environment and diverse livelihoods around that
Land use
The proper control of windfarm locations and the restriction/prevention of developers being able to re-apply for sites previously turned down.
Reduce excessive deer numbers, and encourage re-wilding, working towards acceptance, over time, of beaver, lynx and wolves.
Biodiversity - 6 comments
Biodiversity
Biodiversity loss, and lack of Government action on farming, marine, uplands, etc
biodiversity loss
impact of food system (from production to consumption) on biodiversity and ghg emissions: including soil sealing, internalisation of externalities
Addressing key threats to biodiversity - see Scotland Biodiversity Challenge 2020 Road map
Reduce excessive deer numbers, and encourage re-wilding, working towards acceptance, over time, of beaver, lynx and wolves.
Economic measures – 6 comments
Provoke more debate about limitations of GDP and its supremacy and the importance of additional indicators
Understanding the value of Natural Capital
helping to get serious commitment to finding the right balance between growth, social needs and the environment
a sustainable economic strategy for Scotland
Making the environmental agenda relevant in a political context dominated by austerity/growth/constitutional debates

For LINK members to use economic related concepts, such as Ecosystem Services or Circular Economy, to further their objectives, whilst understanding the limitations these concepts might have

Climate change- 5 comments

hitting climate targets

helping government to find ways to meet climate targets by adjusting and joining up its various strategies

climate change

climate change and energy issues

Climate change - mitigation and adaptation

National parks – 4 comments

The establishment of more National Parks linked to the preparation of management plans for NSA`s and other protected areas.

More National Parks for Scotland

Strengthen protection from huge housing estates and the proposed New town in the Cairngorms National Park,

Securing the commitment of the post-2016 Holyrood administration to preparing a National Parks Strategy for Scotland and to expanding the current family of national parks

Environmental governance and scrutiny – 3 comments

Environmental governance: incl. deregulation agenda, de-legitimising campaigning charities, civil society empowerment, etc.

A revised National Performance Framework appropriately used in scrutiny so that policy is sustainability proofed

Better Wildlife crime enforcement

Energy policy – 3 comments

Energy review crucial for those involved in the landscape side of LINK.

Energy policy

Climate change and energy issues

Other

- 'Habitat loss'
- 'Impact of food system (from production to consumption) on biodiversity and ghg emissions: including soil sealing, internalisation of externalities.'
- 'Presenting a clear, coherent and strong public voice for implementation of sustainable development.'
- 'Lack of Government action on farming, marine, uplands, etc.'
- 'The need for a National Ecological Network'
- 'The establishment of more Marine protected areas and giving them some real teeth especially the control of fishing'
- 'Better protection for Green Belts'
- 'Encompassing health, wellbeing & social justice themes within environment, and ensuring outdoor recreation is still a strand of LINK's work despite loss of MCofS and JMT.'
- '(Impact of food system), overfishing and concentrated animal feeding operations (including salmon farming)'
- 'Freshwater pollution'
- 'Wildlife mortality on roads'
- 'Broadening access to Scotland's natural environment'
- 'Environmental justice'
- 'Better Wildlife crime enforcement'

Appendix 3 – Stakeholder interview participants

Cairngorms National Park Authority

The Crown Estate

Oxfam

Scottish Council for Development and Industry

Scottish Creel Fishermen's Federation

Scottish Government (x3)

Scottish Natural Heritage (x2)

Scottish Parliament (MSP)

University of Dundee