



Note of meeting between SNH and LINK held on 18 March 2010 at Sylvan House, Edinburgh.

SNH: Ian Jardine (Chief Executive)
Karen Wright (Head of External Relations)

LINK: Ian McCall (Chair)
Helen Zealley (President)
Deborah Long (Trustee)
Jonny Hughes (Trustee)
Dan Barlow (Trustee)
Jen Anderson (Chief Officer)
Alice Walsh (Development Officer)

1. Overview of progress since the last meeting (Jan 2009)

Ian McCall outlined key LINK achievements over the past year, in particular work on SLUS, SOAs, Flooding and Marine. There had been good cross border liaison between the eNGOs on ensuring a better fit between the UK and Marine bills; the eNGOs had achieved most of what they sought from the marine bill, it had been a lengthy process with good relationships with officials and with SNH.

2. Key issues ahead for LINK and SNH, potential for cooperation

Ian Jardine noted that Marine, Agriculture and SOAs were SNH's top three priorities for cooperative work ahead.

Marine Protected Areas: there is lot of will from SGov to press ahead but no extra resources for it. SNH is considering how it will progress them in the short term, and looking at countries with comparable regulatory regimes eg Sweden which now has its first MPA, (France and Spain also) and considering the processes they used. LINK Marine TF will also be discussing and will liaise. SWT is losing its marine officer for one year and may use some salary save to research.

Action: Marine TF to note and liaise.

Agriculture: Engaged in influencing the next CAP reform, with SRDP the only vehicle. LINK ATF is well engaged in Scotland. SNH has routes to EU via Scotland Europa. Karen Wright can keep us posted on what is coming up in Brussels. Biodiversity is the theme of Green Week, and potential here to share thinking. SNH has withdrawn from the EEAC; too many voices without a coherent message. Ian J noted some resistance to a 7th Environmental Action Plan; DG Environment is struggling against stronger influence of the other DGs. Biodiversity targets are means for DG Env to get a handle on it and IJ sees NGOs as major allies.

Action: Agriculture and SLUS TFs to note.

Single Outcome Agreements: LINK plans a watchdog role dependent on capacity as members do not cover all 32 areas; current engagement with CoSLA, Audit Scotland, SDC and the Improvement Service. On how to embed general duties eg on biodiversity, flooding, Roddy Fairley leads and SNH will use its resources on councils open to engaging. LINK will challenge local authorities and also take the challenge

back to Government if they are not delivering. SOAs is SGOV's mechanism for achieving these aims, it is not enough to cascade responsibility, the buck stops with Gov. SNH views the Central Belt green network as an opportunity for a positive approach with LAs. There will be no extra funding for it, and Ministers are making no new commitments until after the spending review, though funding that is there can be better spent.

Action: SOAS task force continue liaison

Sustainable Land Use Strategy: Ian Jardine was ambivalent on how much to invest in this process this time round. Predominant thinking was that it was a merging of or reflection of existing strategies (eg Forestry) rather than a drive for new thinking (he had not as yet seen LINK's 5 key steps paper). He welcomed the debates it was starting, eg where trees should go, noting the potential conflict between peat conservation and forestry. Deborah Long encouraged SNH to seize the potential to move forward on some major problems with the biodiversity process, to have discussions on habitat networks, and that it would be a shame to lose this opportunity. IJ noted that 'green infrastructure' was a phrase coming up in Brussels and there was an opportunity to put examples on the rhetoric. Ideas from NGOs were welcomed (SNH slot in Green Week, 1-4 June). All agreed that the 'zoning' approach to the SLUS was to be avoided, though there were pressures for it. IJ would follow up on recent MLURI work on the ecosystem approach and let LINK know.

Action: LINK Task Forces to come up with good examples of multifunctional land use for SNH.

Green economics: Dan Barlow asked if SNH were aware or involved in a new group facilitated by SDC which had met a couple of times to come up with a framework that resonates with SGOV's economic agenda and is compatible with the requirements of the Climate Change Act. This was potentially interesting for SNH.

Action: DB to send information to SNH.

Biodiversity: Minister (and others) is frustrated by the beaurocracy, she needs to be better engaged and inspired. SNH is considering peatlands as a focus; the Board is interested in the role that SNH might have here. LINK is very positive as peat conservation needs leadership. Discussed the potential for tying into central green network (Flanders Moss). IJ invited practical ideas on initiatives and projects that link to the IUCN programme. Clifton Bain would also be asked to convene a meeting of NGOs soon. IJ said that knowing LINK bodies are behind this will help leverage commitment and resources. IJ, Susan Davies and Andrew Cooper are contacts within SNH.

Action: Jonny Hughes to talk to Clifton Bain. Staff to assist collation of ideas for SNH.

Biodiversity funding in relation to SNH grant priorities

DL outlined how some smaller organisations have talked to Susan Davies about their concerns and LINK's wish to reaffirm support for SNH now and in the future in terms of delivering protection for the natural heritage. It is worrying that the new priorities are moving from nature conservation to volunteering and involvement of people, leaving the biodiversity niche empty. Small organisations find it relatively easy to get funding for volunteering, especially with matched funding for biodiversity. This makes it more difficult for these organisations to help SNH deliver biodiversity conservation.

IJ said it was a question of balance, there were signals that HLF may not fund volunteering which was part of the reason for the shift. It is helpful to know HLF is to continue this funding. SNH would keep an eye on it and noted that projects which hit more than one SNH priority will have more chance of success.

KW reported that SNH and HLF had met recently about setting up a challenge fund for biodiversity work, to encourage partner projects and will know the outcome by the end of April, and would keep LINK informed. LINK said that if eNGOs could help to follow this up in any way, to let us know. SNH considered that pure biodiversity projects should be catered for under the SRDP and that effort needs to be put into making this work for biodiversity. SNH were now prohibited from funding farmers under rules of state aid. IM noted that there were concerns about monitoring the biodiversity impacts of TIBRE; IJ thought the project had now closed, and would be responding direct to Hugh Raven. DL noted that the SRDP would need a big shift if it was to deliver benefits for biodiversity. IJ questioned whether the issue was the right advice to farmers, that this needed some unpacking. LINK considered that landowners do need the brokerage of third parties like the NGOs to help their applications, for which the NGOs need core funding to be in a position to help. IJ acknowledged the confusion re advice post FWAG, though SAC is funded by SGov to advise farmers, and SNH needs to know what the gap is if it is to provide additional advice. LINK offered to help and would provide a starter paper for SNH which could then be followed up by a meeting of NGOs, SGov, SAC and SNH. JH noted that NGOs are a very cost effective means of delivery of advice.

Action: LINK Biodiversity/Agri TFs to provide paper.

Marine Renewables

DB outlined LINK current work to develop recommendations on marine renewables. SNH is getting increasing demands from the industry for site survey, monitoring, and pressure from SGov to deliver and this demand will get heavier. No new resources are on offer and SNH is considering what to cut, as trimming is no longer an option. This is new technology and SNH has in some cases no idea of the impacts. SNH is taking a triage approach to case work. IJ considered SNH advice had been listened to for this round, the most worrying sites were not included though some are close, some decisions were made on commercial grounds, and relations with the Crown Estate are good. The 'deploy, monitor and adapt' approach holds a risk that adapt will not happen. All were supportive of marine renewables and keen to avoid the mistakes that happened on land. IJ noted that SNH advice will be fed into Government's explanation of what it means by deploy and monitor, which is expected soon.

The Board has considered what might be dropped. Staff are not interchangeable. Input to other types of planning will be cut, although onshore wind continues to be a pressure on resources. It is likely SNH will pull back from site condition monitoring, although it is a national target, which will not therefore be met. Generally SNH is retreating on promotion of policy debate, which has been a trend for some time, the focus is more on implementing policies.

3. SNH Forward Budget and future grant to LINK.

The decline of 5.5% overall and it is not clear how this will affect SNH. It will be at least 5% in 2011-12. As much of the cost is in staff a sudden cut will hit programmes; grants, research and promotions; also planning on staff reductions of 150 over 3 years. These scenarios are not good particularly for smaller NGOs. IJ advised looking closely at priorities (in the SNH corporate plan) which will be

extremely relevant to commitments beyond the 2010-11 financial year. Offers may not be for more than one year. In the commercial world we would be looking at mergers and acquisitions. With cuts of 10% SNH will withdraw funding from some bodies entirely rather than apply blanket reductions. DL said the more realistic scenario was that Scottish arms of UK NGOs would be closed. Nothing more concrete will be known much before December 2010.

The LINK grant application will follow on from discussions on how we present what we do in terms of what the priorities are. The timescale for KW's review of LINK will be end of June and she will consult LINK trustees in that process. IJ said that what LINK adds is a good argument. NGO input is accessible anyway, without LINK.

4. Next steps

It was agreed to resume the informal occasional dinners with senior SNH staff and NGO representatives.

Action: SNH to contact LINK.

Any other Business

SNH consultation on its approach to working with the third sector: LINK asked for an extension the deadline until the end of March. KW would let us know.

Fred Edwards Trust: IJ suggested John Markland as a possible trustee.

AW 23 March 2010.