

Keith Connal
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Natural Resources Division
Scottish Government
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Dear Keith

Voluntary environment sector representation in stakeholder processes

At our November meeting with the Minister, you invited us to write to you on the issue environmental representation. In discussion then, there was mutual agreement about the need for clarity, consistency and openness.

First, in terms of how LINK members see this working, our guidance (in LINK's operating principles) on acting as a delegate for the network, places the onus on individuals not to take on representation of the wider LINK community unless through agreed LINK channels. The channels are either via a task force relevant to the topic or by ballot among the wider membership. This allows the network to be confident that delegates will be informed on the topic, will understand the range of LINK concerns and positioning, and it gives the delegates a mandate.

We understand that Government sometimes approaches individuals whom they feel have relevant expertise; LINK would not want to discourage individual people or organisations from being invited in their own right as specialists, but asks that a LINK delegate be invited as well (rather than for the specialist to be understood to be a LINK rep, or to be there instead of a LINK rep). Problems arise when individuals invited, are seen as coming from a LINK member organisation and therefore as being able to represent LINK. We ask that Government avoids this happening and instead ensures absolute clarity as to why a person is invited, and on what basis, at the start and in later reportage of that stakeholder process. Where Government wants to ensure and to be able to report that broad voluntary environmental expertise informs a stakeholder process we feel it matters that LINK has the opportunity to nominate delegate(s).

As flagged in the November discussion, there are some stakeholder processes which involve multiple representation of business/industry; in these cases we would like to be confident that a proportionate balance of environmental representation is sought; since our membership covers a broad spectrum of issues and expertise, in some instances more than one LINK place on a stakeholder group will be needed to allow us to reflect that range.

The final point is practical, and that is to ask that Government, when seeking environment representation, approaches LINK direct. This could be via staff or relevant task force convenors or Chair. Our website lists office contact numbers (<http://www.scotlink.org/public/contact/contact.php>) as well as current task force convenors with their contact details (<http://www.scotlink.org/public/about/taskforces.php>) – so it's a good resource.

In general, we feel this is a question of officials being knowledgeable about this part of the voluntary sector, and if in doubt, discussing with one of the above LINK contacts in advance of such appointments being firmed up. LINK has a sound track record of contributing constructively to public policy debate and development on many issues and is keen of course to continue to do so.

If there is anything further we can do to facilitate communications, your advice would be helpful. And we would be happy to discuss this further if that would help.

Regards

Jen Anderson
Chief Officer