

Note of LINK / SNH liaison meeting 26 January 2015, at SNH office in Stirling.

Attending: Simon Jones (LINK Vice-Chair), Beryl Leatherland, Charles Dundas (trustees), Jen Anderson, Alice Walsh (staff), Andrew Bachell, Ian Bray (SNH).

1. LINK plans for 2015 and beyond.

Jen outlined LINK broad plans, explaining range of TFs and processes, capacity issues, political contexts, impacts and evaluation. Progress on the environmental 'narrative' has been slow, will not be a signed up to statement, more of a common understanding of what we stand for, direction Scotland needs to travel, to explain to wider audiences and be promoted by ambassadors. Timescale asap, to articulate for Holyrood elections. Next step a workshop, to inform TF and members work, mainly a comms exercise.

Andrew was very interested, hopes our narrative would chime with SNH's corporate plan, feels it will be helpful for LINK to communicate to SNH's Board what it and ENGOs more generally are for, in terms of their poor understanding. We agreed that LINK chair/vice-chair will to be invited to present to an SNH board meeting, joining pre meeting dinner the evening before. (Game conservation & wildlife trust recently presented). All keen to make this happen. In terms of developing a narrative and getting better understanding and integration across sectors, he later suggested LINK participation at the Operators group of SNH/SEPA, and other ENFOR bodies, also wrestling with similar issues.

Discussed how LINK deals with differences of views within the network, the limits to consensus (eg on wind energy) and LINK's role to bring people together, agree on shared principles, can go so far with it. External perceptions from SNH and its Board, as to whether LINK is now weaker (citing JMT's very regrettable departure), and will clefs widen or be healed? How deeply are member bodies invested in the LINK process? Board investing more time in 1:1 meetings (lots of good feedback, issues to consider), also revisiting energy positions. New members joining, network is dynamic. Andrew observed that issues could do with a bit more noise from the collective. Extent of LINK voice vs Member Body voices is often limited for good reasons. Strategic use of FoS space. Media forum starting up – would SNH like to more info – quite possibly

Will take these perceptions back to LINK Board for discussion.

LINK voice in opposition of Ministerial positions seen by some SNH Board members as a negative, when it should not – role needs to be explained better to them. EG wild land, 11 members behind scenes supporting, JMT most vocal, all useful to SNH.

EU Refit work through Joint Links discussed. Greg Mudge leading for SNH.

Action: Put Paul, Deborah and Craig in touch with him to ensure good comms.

Zoe Kemp seconded to SG for Land Reform Bill, has previously worked on LUS.

Ministerial access discussed, new minister largely unknown quantity, has met chair and deputy on general issues.

LINK networking events, SNH needs to know level of person to send. EG Festive reception not well attended by CEOs and other VIPs, in comparison to RSPB event. Not an issue, but SNH need clarity on level of attendee. (SEW reception more worthwhile in those terms).

Action: send SEW programme to Ian Bray.

2. SNH update.

Ian Jardine in Brussels for at least one year. If more, will recruit new CEO. For now, Susan Davies replacing. Lot of flux with Ron McDonald retiring.

Action: Ian will advise changes by email.

(LL&TPA Gordon Watson new CEO. Terry A'Hearn new SEPA CEO, Bridgid Campbell replacing Bob Macintosh)

Board at minimum level (8) with new members to be recruited next year, and the following 2 years. SNH favours recruitment in one tranche with some coming on as others' terms end over next 3 years. All to be selected by Scottish Government. Applications from good candidate's influential and well connected within their sectors have fallen off. Women in their 30s particularly sought. Ian Ross keen to change the focus from governance to wider strategy.

Board meetings held partly in public, some important papers discussed. Nobody comes. Andrew feels there should be some scrutiny.

Corporate Plan, LINK letter input noted, aim to have it signed off end March, will be tight. Budget - assuming same level for next year, and planning for flatline for the next 2. There will be areas that cannot grow – implications will be in an Issues paper. Hope LINK will review this and flag up the gaps & implications for the environment. Work on SBS, INNS, species framework, greenspace, deer – political support not foreseen to push costs onto the deer management sector. Lots of action for species. Or getting rid of INNS? Tough choices, need to have discussions. Wildcats on the up, supported by HLF funding. Other species don't have the same backing. Beavers – either way it will cost, no budget whatever the decision.

General rewilding agenda (Mark Wrightman leads), ties in with Review of Protected Areas, to be on the website from coming Wednesday. Independent panel (chaired by S Pepper), report is to stimulate debate. Will be various issues papers flowing from it. Not a consultation though will be talking to people as these are being written.

Action: Agreed that there needs to be a conversation with LINK bodies, and will look to LINK to help here.

Major new initiative on Greenspace Infrastructure exercise with 14-15m of EU money matched with 25m from other sources, including parts of the public sector, to spend, mainly in central belt and conurbations. W SNH business model needing new sources, don't see this as competing with NGOs (eg Peatlands). Delivery time 7 years. Set out in management team papers, will share when possible. Various members will be drawn in.

Access and Landscape – Still on the agenda. Access in relation to statutory duties. Landscape Charter – need to get political support.

SNH can only do what it is paid to do. SG planning for 20-25% cuts, not feasible, in reality about 10% over 2 years, will be consequences for everyone, grant aid included. Some grants cut significantly. Need to look carefully at what £s buying for the environment. Staff down

150 in last 4 years, 25% of posts, no implications yet in service for customers. Numbers will be reducing anyway, if it gets to 10% will affect services. Nothing is outside of target area, either LINK or MBBs.

Common issue of concern is reduction in capacity, as KPIs increase and funding drops, all poorer. Public interest will start to suffer. What are we offering to sell? Whole issue of mobilising people, citizen science etc, part of what SNH has to deliver.

For LINK next year £50k, awaiting confirmation re SG funding, before we get the letter.

ENFOR collaboration – SNH sharing comms person with SEPA soon. No alarms on the horizon so far. If formal merger of FC & SNH, will be disruption, but nothing worse (keep eye on GB developments). SNH and SEPA merger could risk dilution of effort on Natura Directives. Do not see benefits of merging as they work well together now.

Suggested liaison meeting with SNH, SEPA, widening to bigger Enfor Operators group, later this year. River Basin Management Plans an issue. Lots going on behind the scenes to join up and be more integrated, hence useful to involve LINK (keen).

Relying on TFs and their contacts to flag up wider allies and connections.
Option to host a secondment (SNH to LINK, capacity more ltd the other way).
Working collaboratively also good.

Robustness: our efforts to ensure best negotiating positions, peer to peer review and advice. More difficult to be robust if agencies are keeping silent.