

# A STRONG COHERENT VOICE

## Reflections on the First Twenty Years of Scottish Environment LINK

Michael Scott OBE



Published by Scottish Environment LINK, October 2007.

2 Grosvenor House, Shore Road, Perth, PH1 6BD

Copyright ©2006-07 Scottish Environment LINK. All photos copyright LINK and LINK Members.

Reproduction is permitted only with prior written permission.

Cover: Launch of LINK's 'every**one**' campaign for the European election, 2004.

Text printed on NAPM approved paper from 100% recovered paper.

Cover printed on ECF low chlorine paper from well managed forests.

Printed by Woods, Perth.

If there was new Scottish LINK, someone would have to invent it.

*Widely quoted aphorism*

LINK allows member organisations the possibility of punching above their weight, by drawing on the support, knowledge and experience available in the network.

*John Pringle, former Vice Chair, LINK*

LINK is the fundamental mouthpiece of the conservation movement in Scotland.

*Roger Crofts, former Chief Executive, Scottish Natural Heritage*

LINK presents a coherent voice to the environment movement, which forces politicians to give it recognition and respect.

*Robin Pellew, former Chief Executive, National Trust for Scotland*

Without LINK Scotland would be much further behind in reflecting the environmental mainstream.

*Simon Pepper, former Director, WWF Scotland*

## **FOREWORD**

Michael Scott has done the environment movement in Scotland a great service in capturing the history of Scottish Environment LINK's first twenty years. He tells the story with the insight and compassion of someone extensively involved with those years.

The issues, moods, excitement and transition contained in these two decades of organisational development are faithfully reflected. This transition from tentative grouping to powerful expression of the collective voice of member organisations and the progression from seeking the opportunity to express a view to a position where it would be unthinkable not to be consulted are well conveyed.

All this in itself would put the movement in Michael's debt but his reflections and the diligently recorded impressions of others do not simply look backwards, they also considered the future. He sees the dangers of accommodation to political institutions and the challenges of the changing world in which LINK operates.

LINK must always be challenging both of itself and of the other institutions in our society. While the environment is now on everybody's agenda LINK has to make sure that rhetoric becomes reality. It has to appreciate that lobbying political institutions is not now sufficient to ensure fundamental change in attitudes to the cherishing of our Earth. LINK has to engage in helping to secure major attitudinal shifts on the part of the public. It must continue to put at the service of wider society the fruits of the unique synergy secured by its member organisations working together.

The report concludes with the challenge for fresh and creative approaches. That is where we are going.

I hope you will enjoy a stimulating read, with lessons are plenty for campaigners who have their work cut out in the years ahead.

**Fred Edwards LVO**  
October 2007

## **PREFACE**

This report was commissioned in 2007 to celebrate the 20th anniversary of Scottish Environment LINK, the network of voluntary countryside and environmental organisations in Scotland<sup>1</sup>. It marks twenty years in which the influence of these organisations has grown hugely in Scotland, and it comes at a time when the environment is higher on the political agenda than ever before.

That rise in status comes partly from the huge growth in support for LINK member bodies over the period, until today their combined membership exceeds half a million people – 10 per cent of the Scottish population. This increased support has allowed these organisations to increase progressively their engagement in the environmental issues that matter most to Scots. LINK has played a critical part in stimulating this groundswell of environmental concern in Scotland, as the ‘glue’ that welds together these diverse organisations into an effective, unified network. This report reviews how this has been achieved since LINK was inaugurated in 1987.

It is typical of LINK that it did not wish this report to be self-congratulatory. Rather, the brief was to reflect on two decades of experience, and draw lessons from this for the next 20 years, by talking to LINK campaigners from the early days, younger activists now driving the network, and key partners with whom LINK has worked over the years.

I was invited to write this report, as someone with a long LINK engagement. I attended my first LINK meeting in May 1987, joined the management team in 1991, became chair of the management team in 1994, and chair of LINK from 1995 to 1999. From then until 2005, I moved across to be Deputy Chair of Scottish Natural Heritage (SNH), giving me a different perspective on LINK’s engagement with ministers and agencies in Scotland.

To know where you are going, it is important to understand where you have come from, and I hope this report will help the new generation of LINK activists and supporters to understand the background that forged the effective organisation we see today. I hope that network organisations in other sectors of Scottish society might find this report informative. Above all, I hope the many individuals and organisations who work with LINK will find useful pointers on how LINK works, and how best to work with LINK.

I thank all the individuals who offered their thoughts in compiling this report. Their detailed comments have been captured in a much longer report to the LINK Board, and informed this shorter version for wider audiences. I am grateful also to the LINK commissioning group for their guidance, and to Jen Anderson and Alice Walsh for their encyclopaedic insights into LINK’s history.

**Michael Scott OBE**  
May 2007

---

<sup>1</sup> Known as Scottish Wildlife and Countryside Link until 1999, and referred to as LINK throughout this report.

# CONTENTS

## 1. THE 20-YEAR JOURNEY

1.1	Genesis	1
1.2	First Steps	5
1.3	The Way Things Were	8
1.4	LINK Today – Twenty Years On	10

## 2. WORKING PRINCIPLES

2.1	Hang Together or Hang Separately	12
2.2	Leadership	13
2.3	Safe Hands	17
2.4	Tackling the Task	17
2.5	Reliability and Authority	19
2.6	Partner Perspectives	20

## 3. PARLIAMENTARY RELATIONS

3.1	Grasping the Nettle	22
3.2	A Second Chamber	24
3.3	The Road to ‘Everyone’	26

## 4. TOWARDS 2027

4.1	Back to Basics	28
4.2	New Pathways to Civic Scotland	29
4.3	The Quest For Big Ideas	30

*If there was no Scottish LINK, someone would have to invent it.*  
(Widely-quoted aphorism)

*LINK allows member organisations the possibility of punching above their weight, by drawing on the support, knowledge and experience available in the network.*  
John Pringle, former LINK Vice Chair

*LINK is the fundamental mouthpiece of the conservation movement in Scotland.*  
Roger Crofts, former Chief Executive, Scottish Natural Heritage

*LINK presents a coherent voice to the environment movement, which forces politicians to give it recognition and respect.*  
Robin Pellew, former Chief Executive, National Trust for Scotland

*Without LINK, Scotland would be much further behind in reflecting the environmental mainstream.*  
Simon Pepper, former Director, WWF Scotland

## 1. THE 20-YEAR JOURNEY

### 1.1 Genesis

On 3 February 1987, nineteen stalwarts from Scottish environmental NGOs (non-governmental organisations) met in the Waverley Hotel in Perth for the inaugural meeting of what was then called the Scottish Wildlife and Countryside Link. The fourteen NGOs that agreed to sign up to the new body on that February day ranged from influential, large organisations like the RSPB, National Trust for Scotland and what was then called the World Wildlife Fund (WWF), to smaller groups like the Badenoch and Strathspey Conservation Group and Scottish Rights of Way Society. Critically, they included both wildlife bodies and countryside bodies, while Friends of the Earth Scotland espoused a wider environmental perspective.

David Minns of the RSPB chaired that first meeting, and was elected unopposed as the new body's interim chair, with Drennan Watson, representing the North East Mountain Trust, as vice chair. The representatives at the meeting were already well-used to working together, because the origins of LINK can be traced back seven years earlier to the first campaign to stop the development of skiing in the Northern Cairngorms, including Lurcher's Gully. Several conservation, landscape and recreation bodies got together to fight the proposal, and drew inspiration from regular meetings to plan tactics.

Guided in particular by Drennan Watson, the campaign group decided to focus not just on the specific conservation value of the land involved, but also on wider policy issues – the fact, for example, that the planning application was being considered in a policy vacuum, without any national planning guidelines to cover ski developments. This approach was seen as audacious in its day, but it was successful: in December 1982, the Secretary of State for Scotland announced his decision not to approve the development of downhill skiing in the northern corries. His ruling supported the group's evidence on the landscape and wildlife value of the corries and on the economic failings of the proposal.

Simon Pepper, former director of WWF Scotland, says it is difficult to over-estimate the sense of triumph in this victory. By acting together, the various objecting bodies had been much more than the sum of their parts. The individuals involved enjoyed bouncing ideas off each other, and valued the innovative approaches that emerged as a result of this process.



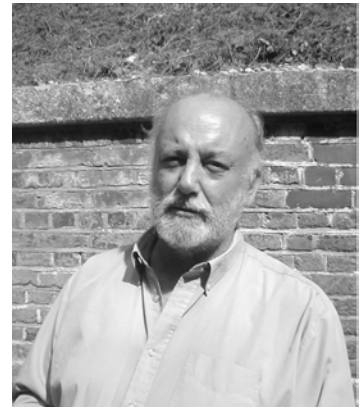
Following this experience, in 1982 Watson wrote to a range of voluntary countryside bodies, proposing that the working approaches developed at the inquiry should be continued. Referring to the inquiry, he wrote:

“Firstly, I think the value of the co-operation between the recreational groups, and also between them and the wildlife protection bodies, was realised by all. We learned much from each other, and greatly increased our overall impact by intelligent co-operation. These lessons can surely be applied to other issues too.”

He suggested that representatives of the various voluntary bodies might meet informally to discuss whatever broad topics they regarded as relevant. The result was the establishment in early 1984 of regular meetings of what was called the ‘round table’. As well as those already mentioned, organisations attending these early meetings included:

British Association of Nature Conservationists (BANC)  
Mountaineering Council of Scotland (MCoS)  
Ramblers Association Scotland (RAS)  
Scottish Conservation Projects (SCP)  
Scottish Countryside Activities Council (SCAC)  
Scottish Wild Land Group (SWLG)  
Scottish Wildlife Trust (SWT)

Simon Pepper sees the “extraordinary serendipity” of the individuals involved at this stage as critical. Drennan Watson was the “scarred campaigner, with strong sensibilities about the user community” (he had developed new techniques in a successful campaign against a major quarry proposal at Longhaven Cliffs in Aberdeenshire). Bob Aitken of SCAC brought a more intellectual approach, but represented the strong Scottish culture of hillwalking, along with David Grosz of the RAS. David Minns had strong business management and PR skills, but also brought a clear sense of reality. Xanthe Jay of FoES was an enthusiastic and imaginative campaigner, with strong affinities to people. With other ‘young Turks’ from BANC, she helped ensure that the new grouping avoided bogging itself unnecessarily in formalities.



Drennan Watson, Simon Pepper and David Minns, provided energy and direction from the beginning.

Bob Aitken thinks that the choice of Watson as chairman was particularly important:

“By the time of Lurchers, Drennan had revolutionised ideas of what was possible for the voluntary sector. He had changed our perspective, not least because of his superior intellect to the people we were opposing.”

Aitken and others also see the role of Simon Pepper as critical. After a year as a fundraiser for the WWF, he had shifted to a policy role in 1986 – an innovation because WWF had previously viewed Scotland only as a source of money, not a conservation priority. Simon Pepper, more than anyone, saw the need to draw conservation into the mainstream.

In London, a precedent had already been set in 1980 with the establishment of a partnership called Wildlife Link (WL). In April 1986, a delegation from WL, led by the organisation’s chair Lord Peter Melchett, came to Scotland to investigate the potential for financial support for a new body to “extend the reach of Wildlife Link northwards”. The group also included Chris Tydeman from WWF. They visited Duich Moss on Islay, the scene of another contemporary conservation battle, attended a meeting of the round table, and spent a day in the Cairngorms with Drennan Watson – although Watson was not hugely impressed by the group, which he saw as an English takeover bid.

After their visit, Chris Tydeman summarised the group’s conclusions in a paper called *Scotland: A Case for Treatment* – a patronising title that infuriated Simon Pepper, even if he welcomed the paper’s outcome. It has not been possible to trace a copy of the document, but a confidential minute of the trip by Tydeman establishes its broad conclusions:

“It seems to me that, in order to achieve conservation in Scotland (*sic*), we need to strengthen the voluntary sector. One way to achieve this would be to promote and formalise the round table to be more like the existing Wildlife

and Countryside Links. There are potential complications in that some bodies like WWF and RSPB are national, and there could be some confusion and contradiction without care. Nonetheless, such an organisation would be invaluable to WWF in its initial stages of a conservation presence, and would provide a focal point from which to negotiate with the Scottish Office.”

Importantly, Tydeman also offered a ‘grant in principle’, to encourage the formation of the new network.

It would be wrong to suggest that this WL/WWF initiative led directly to the establishment of LINK. The round table was already considering a gradual evolution in this direction. But the offer of funding – on the very clear understanding that it was free of ‘strings’ from the south – made it possible to accelerate the process, and also ensured that the new organisation was a high priority on Simon Pepper’s work plan.

A working group was therefore set up, under the auspices of the round table, to consider the establishment of a new Scotland-wide organisation. From June 1986, a series of meetings were held in Perth to develop the constitution for the new body. Unlike in England, all involved were convinced that the new Scottish body should embrace both wildlife and countryside. Wildlife Link in London included animal welfare bodies, but it was felt that this could lead to confusion and potential conflicts of interest in Scotland, so the constitution was designed appropriately. It stated that membership was open to voluntary organisations whose aims include the conservation of landscape, wildlife or amenity in Scotland (thus effectively ruling out purely animal welfare bodies), and which have a substantial interest in Scotland (excluding UK bodies without a significant presence in Scotland).

The aims of LINK were identified as:

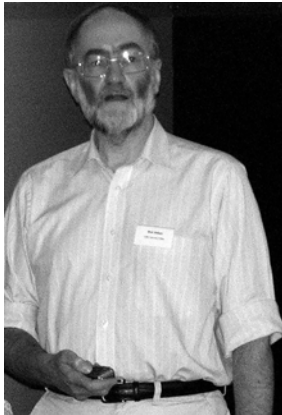
- maintaining closer contact between relevant organisations
- improving communication between the voluntary sector and government bodies and the media
- gaining a higher profile for conservation in Scotland.

## 1.2 First Steps

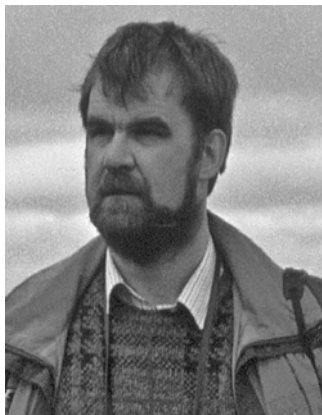
This groundwork laid the way for that first constituted meeting of LINK in February 1987. The meeting approved the role for a LINK secretary, identified start-up costs, and agreed to approach WWF and the Special Grants (Environmental) Programme scheme run by the Scottish Development Department (SDD) for 50% each of these running costs; the SDD later agreed funding of £7,500 for that first year. The possibility was also identified of approaching the Nature Conservancy Council (NCC) or Countryside Commission for Scotland (CCS) for grants towards specific projects. The meeting moved on to specific conservation issues, including skiing, the Cairngorms and national parks, this established several of the themes which became LINK preoccupations in later years.

This was followed by the first AGM in May 1987, at which Drennan Watson was unanimously elected chair, with David Minns as vice chair and Simon Pepper and Bob Aitken on the management committee. Several new organisations had applied for membership, and each was assessed against the contribution they could make to the roles identified in the constitution.

At this meeting, new themes began to emerge. A fish farming working party had been set up, with Simon Pepper as its chair. Further working parties (now called task forces) were proposed on forestry, and, inevitably, on the Cairngorms. Already the benefit of joint working was apparent: LINK had been invited to provide a speaker for a 15-minute presentation on nature conservation in Scotland at the House of Lords.



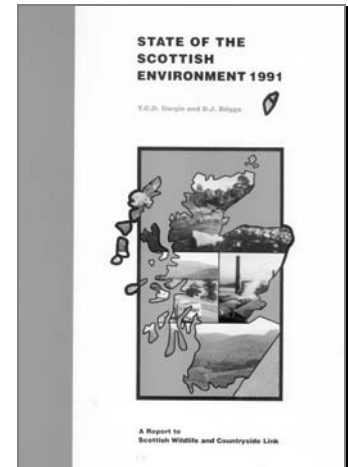
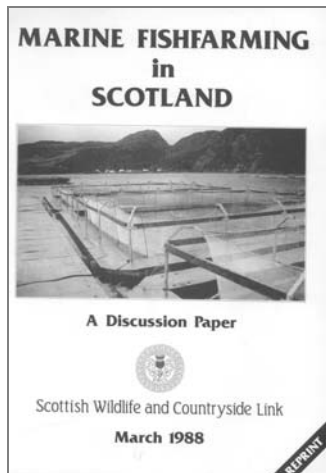
Bob Aitken, a voice for landscape throughout.



Michael Scott, chair 1995-99



Seaton Baxter, first president



Some early influential reports undertaken by LINK.

In September 1987, according to Minns' records, LINK had its first formal meeting with a Minister, Lord James Douglas-Hamilton, who was Under Secretary of State for Scotland from 1987 to 1995. The following month, a meeting was held with the

CCS, although minutes report that this meeting was "disappointing and no real progress had been made". The first regular meeting with Scottish officials of the NCC was held soon after, followed later by meetings with the Scottish Crofters' Union and Forestry Commission (under joint auspices with the English Links, but chaired by Drennan Watson).

Simon Pepper recalls the "profoundly reassuring feeling of actually collaborating" as LINK began its work. "We were feeling frail against the forces of darkness", he recalls, but LINK pointed a way forward. David Minns was "fed up being on the front line all the time". He didn't expect LINK to shout, but he did want "a nice big, solid body behind me, marching into the Minister's office and having a meeting". Both Pepper and Minns had a vision for LINK, and both admit profound relief that LINK has survived and grown to the influential body it is in 2007.

The formal press launch of LINK was delayed until February 1988. A quote in the press release by Drennan Watson gives a clear perspective on these early days:

"Environmental problems are arising in Scotland at an accelerating rate, and are of increasing technical complexity. It is becoming more difficult for any single voluntary organisation to understand and act on all these issues. If we are to prevent these problems steadily degrading the unique environment of Scotland and the quality of life of its people, environmental groups in Scotland need to co-ordinate their efforts and increase their effectiveness. We hope the formation of Scottish LINK will be a major step towards achieving this."

In March 1988, a LINK delegation had its first formal meeting with the SDD Rural Environment and Nature Conservation (RENC) Division. At the meeting, LINK raised concerns about the process of appointing committee members for CCS and the NCC Scottish Committee, and the lack of action by the Scottish Office in pursuing World Heritage Site status for the Cairngorms.

By the time they met with RENC again eight months later, Roger Crofts (later to become chief executive of Scottish Natural Heritage) had become head of the division. According to the minutes, he expressed pleasure at the development of LINK, and said “he believed LINK’s positive approach would cause the development ‘group’ to have to meet the conservation lobby in the middle ground, thus preventing entrenchment of attitudes.”

In 1989, LINK commissioned an external review of its effectiveness, which concluded that LINK was on the right track. The 1990-91 Annual Report therefore commented:

“...The last four years have established LINK as a useful organisation for its members, and members have noted, with some satisfaction, LINK’s rapid growth and development towards critical mass, which involves being able to deal effectively with crises, having a sufficient range of expertise to deal with most eventualities, and being in a position to set the agenda rather than respond to it.”

LINK had arrived!



### 1.3 The Way Things Were

Looking back from 2007, it is already becoming difficult to imagine the frustrations of life for LINK before the Parliament. The 1980s were a difficult time for the conservation movement in Scotland. The decade began encouragingly with the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981, but Scotland was facing many environmental controversies. As well as the Longhaven Quarry and Northern Corries development proposals already mentioned, LINK stalwarts from these early days remember (amongst other *cause celebre*):

- the boom in North Sea oil developments
- recognition of the impact of ‘acid rain’
- the so-called ‘Integrated Development Plan’ for the Western Isles
- the development of fish farming on the north and west coasts
- the growth of forestry, fuelled by a system of tax breaks, especially in sensitive areas like the Flow Country of Caithness and Sutherland..

On the political front, elections in 1983 and 1987 had seen the Conservative party re-elected, but with the number of Tory MPs in Scotland in “freefall”. In the absence of any democratic mandate in Scotland, and the frequent dearth of ministerial clout, a small cabal of heads of department in the Scottish Office were running the country. Access to ministers was usually possible only after a preliminary meeting with these officials, and only if they were then willing to brief ministers to accept LINK’s request for a meeting. Otherwise, LINK’s requests for meetings were simply, and frequently, rejected. LINK also struggled to meet Scottish MPs, who spent most of their time at Westminster.

Simon Pepper recalls that the early days of LINK were “pretty gruelling, tearing lumps out of the Scottish Office, Forestry Commission, NCC etc”, and he recollects that “engagements with ministers were hostile”. In January 1989, LINK issued a press release calling on Lord James Douglas-Hamilton, the Minister of Home Affairs and Environment, to meet with them urgently “to explain the government’s policies for the reconciliation of conservation and development”. A meeting was duly arranged in March, after which Drennan Watson wrote to the Minister to thank him for the “patience with which you listened to our views” – code, perhaps, for the fact that the Minister himself contributed very little!



use this figure to support its

Longhaven Cliffs, focus for early NGO co-operation.

Later in 1989, LINK made a public call for a meeting with ministers to discuss plans to split the NCC and merge its Scottish operations with the CCS. It was offered another meeting with Lord James, but refused, arguing that this was a political decision taken at a much higher level. It insisted on meeting the Secretary of State, and the gambit paid off: in December 1989, a group from member bodies duly met with Malcolm Rifkind. Although LINK felt it was taking a big gamble in insisting it should meet with the Scottish Secretary, one of his officials at the time says they were pushing at an open door. Rifkind had quickly worked out just how many potential voters the LINK member bodies represented (long before LINK began to

own case), and instructed his officials to make the meeting happen.

According to the minutes, Rifkind argued that nature conservation had been much more controversial in Scotland than elsewhere in the UK, and believed that a Scottish natural heritage agency would be more likely to command public respect. Simon Pepper responded that it had been relatively easy for the Scottish Office to ignore the advice of the CCS (which the Scottish Office wholly funded) in the past. The minutes note that Rifkind “responded crossly that increased funding had recently been allocated to CCS” – ministerial crossness was not unusual at LINK meetings in those days!

LINK also recognised the importance of establishing a relationship with the main opposition party, and in July 1991 it arranged a meeting with Donald Dewar, then Shadow Scottish Secretary, attended also by Sam Galbraith, Brian Wilson and a young research officer called Wendy Alexander. On the agenda were national parks and the right to roam – both issues that would form a significant aspect of Labour’s manifesto in 1997.



## 1.4 LINK Today – Twenty Years On

In contrast to those early years, the 2007 LINK Annual Report shows that, during the year, it had regular meetings with Scottish ministers; presented evidence to two committees of the Scottish Parliament; attended most of the political party conferences; ran a very successful Scottish Environment Week; launched a major ‘everyone’ campaign in the run-up to the Scottish election; and published an “everyone’s watching” end-of-term report on the environmental performance of the outgoing Scottish Parliament and ministers.

Ten task forces, and a range of other groupings, were developing LINK’s work, and LINK was represented on a range of a wide range of major national stakeholder groups, convened by the Scottish Executive or its agencies, as listed below for 2006.

### **TASKFORCE DELEGATES TO STAKEHOLDER GROUPS 2006-07**

#### **Agriculture**

- SE Single Farm Payment Implementation Group
- SE Land Management Contract Group
- SE Scottish Rural Development Programme stakeholder group
- Natural Resources Sub-group
- SEERAD Organic Stakeholders Group
- SAC Conservation Liaison Committee
- SE Less Favoured Areas working group
- Rural Dialogue Group, convened by SCVO
- Scottish Biodiversity Strategy Rural Land Use Working Group

#### **Biodiversity**

- SE Biodiversity Action Grants Scheme (BAGS) Assessment Panel
- SE Scottish Biodiversity Committee
- DEFRA Non Native Invasive Species GB Strategy Working Group
- UK Priority Species and Habitats Review Working Group,

#### **Climate**

- SE Environmental Reference Group of Strategic Transport Project Review
- DEFRA EU Emissions Trading Scheme Phase 2 (ETS) group
- SE Review of the Scottish Climate Change Programme
- SE SEA of the Scottish Climate Change Programme
- SE Scottish Climate Change Impacts Partnership
- Scottish Rural Development Plan - Natural Resources sub group
- Climate Change and Agriculture Stakeholder Group

#### **Deer**

- DCS Advisory Group on Management Strategy for Wild Deer

#### **Freshwater**

- SE Diffuse Pollution Working Group
- National Stakeholders Forum for the Water Environment and Services Act
- WFD Economic Advisory Steering Group
- SE Environment Group, National Technical Advisory Group on Flooding
- SNIFFER Floodrisk Management Steering Group
- SE Environment Group Flooding Issues Advisory Committee
- Seafish Industries Authority Sustainable Fisheries Advisory Group
- SEPA RBMP (River Basin Management Plans) National Advisory Group
- SEPA Scottish Aquatic Environment Monitoring Strategy (SAEMS)

**Landscape**

SNH Scottish Landscape Forum  
Sustainable Tourism Partnership  
Sustainable Estates

**Marine**

Advisory Group on the Marine and Coastal Strategy (AGMACS)  
Sea Fisheries Advisory and Reference Group (Sea-FAR)  
Scottish Coastal Forum  
Sea Fish Industry Authority Sustainable Fisheries Advisory Group  
Ministerial Working Group for Aquaculture  
Scottish Inshore Fisheries Advisory Group (SIFAG)  
Atlantic Frontier Environmental Forum  
Scottish Aquaculture Research Forum (SARF)  
Location, Relocation Working Group  
Marine implementation group of the Scottish Biodiversity Forum  
Scottish Bathing Waters Review Panel  
DTI SEA Group  
Outer Hebrides Inshore Fisheries Group

**Planning**

Widening the Right of Appeal in Scottish Planning System Consultation Group  
SE Environmental Advisory Forum for Renewable Energy (EAFRE)  
SE SEA of SSP6 Renewable Energy

**Sustainable Scotland**

Civic Forum's Future Scotland Partnership  
SE Waste Liaison Group  
Waste Prevention Network

**Woodland**

Scottish Forestry Forum  
Forestry Commission Scottish Forestry Strategy Review Steering Group  
FC National Forestry Forum  
FC Scottish Forest Grants Scheme Applicants' Group  
FC CPG on Forestry and Forest Products

As LINK President, Fred Edwards has a clear perspective on this:

“Thanks to the hard work and integrity of the pioneers, LINK has slowly evolved from being a simple lobbying organisation to being a key stakeholder and consultee of the State. There are things now that ministers wouldn’t dream of doing without consulting LINK. Of course they’re not committed to doing what they hear from LINK, nor should they, but they recognise that they would be failing the system if they didn’t at least *listen* to what LINK has to say”.

So what allowed LINK to make such major progress in its influence and effectiveness over these twenty years? That is the focus for the rest of this report.

## 2. WORKING PRINCIPLES

### 2.1 Hang Together or Hang Separately

Looking back over twenty years, everyone interviewed for this report recognises that LINK has one fundamental role: to ensure that the voluntary environment movement speaks with a concerted voice – or at least that, where different bodies choose to take different stances, they do so in ways that respect the views of their colleagues.

Lloyd Austin, a past LINK chair, emphasises that the most important purpose of LINK is the most mundane – the exchange of information and intelligence. “That is the cake”, he says, “and collective action is the icing.” Deborah Long of Plantlife Scotland (and current vice chair of LINK) talks about the immense value of LINK to small organisations. LINK offers support with information and contacts in a Scottish context, and she believes she is able to get much more done for Plantlife as a result.

At the opposite end of the membership scale, Anne McCall of the RSPB reckons that her organisation also gets good value from LINK. As a bird organisation, it would struggle to be taken seriously in the energy debate, for example, but, by working together with FoES, WWF and RAS, it gains acceptance as a sound voice on energy policy.

Robin Pellew, former chief executive of the NTS, points out another benefit of joint campaigning:

“For an organisation like the NTS, active political campaigning in the name of the NTS is still not acceptable to much of the membership – it is deemed too radical. It is much easier to throw the NTS’s weight behind the campaigning work of LINK, even if this includes themes on which the NTS has no declared position.”

In taking forward its work, Fred Edwards says it has been vital for LINK to avoid becoming a competitor with its constituent bodies for funding or support, although he recognises there is inevitable competition for column inches in the media. He describes LINK as “much more an ecology, a collectedness of niches”.

Pat Wells of the Badenoch and Strathspey Conservation Group emphasises the vital role of the small member bodies, whose representatives bring a little more reality to the proceedings, she says, through their detailed understanding of events and perceptions at the local level. The former ministerial advisers spoken to for this report also emphasised how important the breadth of representation within LINK was to them and to ministers. It is easy for ministers to meet regularly with the

larger NGOs, but meeting with LINK gives them access to a much wider range of smaller bodies, representing a diverse range of constituencies (in every sense!). ministers value that breadth of representation.

Dave Morris, Director RAS, says that, in principle, LINK is an outstanding success in offering one-door access for the government and its agencies to meet with the voluntary sector. The downside, he says, is that the government often gives a single place to LINK on consultative groups, when separately the different interest groups on LINK might well have won several places.

## 2.2 Leadership

Lloyd Austin recalls that, when David Minns first introduced him to LINK back in 1990, he commented that “if you can keep this lot together, you’ll be able to solve the Bosnian crisis”. Perhaps, then, the greatest success is that “this lot” is still together in 2007. Part of the credit for that success lies with the individuals who have led the organisation over its 20-year history, each bringing different skills and different perspectives.

Undoubtedly, the most formative leadership was provided by LINK’s founder chairman, Drennan Watson. There is wide agreement that nobody could have fulfilled this role better than Watson. He was clear from the start that LINK “should be an enabling organisation, not a campaigning one that competed with its members”. He says his role was “to facilitate joint action, while ensuring that each member kept its identity”.

As LINK grew in influence and began to gain access to ministers, Watson was sometimes criticised for campaigning, but he had a well-practiced reply:

“Not at all. I run a bus! Today the bus destination board says ‘Scottish Office’, tomorrow it might say ‘Forestry Commission’. With it, I bring passengers and messages. All aboard! Ding, ding!”

Watson set a difficult standard for others to follow, and at the end of his term no obvious candidate was available to succeed him. Instead, it was agreed to seek a chairperson who would “perform an ambassadorial role, act as a ‘door-opener’ to ministers and to dealings with government, chair the AGM and important functions, and be able to lead the organisation and cultivate contact with other organisations”. Responsibility for managing the organisation passed to the chair of the management team. Following a short-listing process, Professor Seaton Baxter, Reader in the Faculty of Design at the Robert Gordon University, was duly elected as chair.

Michael Scott, representing Plantlife Scotland, became vice chair and chair of the management team.

Soon after Baxter's appointment, it became clear that the title of chair raised expectations that he would have a detailed understanding of LINK's position on all the main issues of the day, something that had never been envisaged for this ambassadorial post. His position was further complicated by his appointment to the Main Board of SNH in March 1995. Accordingly, the LINK AGM in 1995 agreed that Baxter's task should be redefined as president, thus allowing him to continue his ambassadorial role. Scott then assumed the title of chair, while remaining essentially an internal manager of LINK's ongoing business.

After five years as chair of the management team, Scott stood down in June 1999 when he was appointed to the Board of SNH. No immediate successor was identified, so John Pringle of the Scottish Wild Land Group took on chairing responsibilities, while insisting he remained vice chair. Pringle oversaw important changes to the LINK constitution to meet new requirements on charities law.

Meanwhile, a sub-group was set up to identify a suitable chair, reverting once more to the external role. Following their advice, Rear Admiral Neil Rankin, Chair of the Scottish Seabird Centre (by then a LINK member body), was elected LINK chair in June 2000. Lloyd Austin of the RSPB became management team chair and Seaton Baxter retired at the end of his presidential term. Rankin "helped captain the ship, at a time when things were going really well", according to Jennifer Anderson. Lloyd Austin meanwhile provided invaluable continuity and leadership as chair of the management team.



John Pringle, acting chair 1999

Neil Rankin, chair 2000-02



Lloyd Austin, chair 2004-06

Simon Pepper suggests that this constant redefining of the role of Chair and President reflects a sort of “inside/outside schizophrenia”, which is not always easy for external observers to understand. The table below therefore shows something of how these roles have changed over the years:

Pepper points out that the table shows “the staggering leadership commitment by the RSPB over 20 years in the service of the movement”. The RSPB has provided a chair or vice chair for fourteen out of LINK’s twenty years, has been represented throughout on the management team or board, and has also provided convenors for several working groups and task forces.

Neil Rankin stood down as LINK Chair in June 2003, and the post was again vacant for a year while his successor was sought. In the meantime, changes to the LINK constitution meant that Austin formally became chair of the LINK Board.

Date	President	Chair	‘Significant Others’	Post
<b>Scottish Wildlife and Countryside Link</b>				
Feb 1987		David Minns		
June 1987		Drennan Watson	David Minns	Vice Chair
June 1988		Drennan Watson	David Minns	Vice Chair
June 1989		Drennan Watson	David Minns	Vice Chair
June 1990		Drennan Watson	David Minns	Vice Chair
June 1991		Drennan Watson	David Minns	Vice Chair
June 1992		Vacant	David Minns and Alastair Lavery	Vice Chair
June 1993		Vacant	David Minns	Chair, Management Team
June 1994		Seaton Baxter	Michael Scott	Vice Chair/Chair, Management Team
June 1995	Seaton Baxter	Michael Scott	Penny Edwards	Vice Chair
June 1996	Seaton Baxter	Michael Scott	Penny Edwards	Vice Chair
June 1997	Seaton Baxter	Michael Scott		
<b>Scottish Environment LINK</b>				
June 1998	Seaton Baxter	Michael Scott		
June 1999	Seaton Baxter	Vacant	John Pringle	Vice Chair/Acting Chair
June 2000		Neil Rankin	Lloyd Austin	Vice Chair/Chair, Management Team
June 2001		Neil Rankin	Lloyd Austin	Vice Chair/Chair, Management Team
June 2002		Neil Rankin	Lloyd Austin	Vice Chair/Chair, Management Team
June 2003		Vacant	Lloyd Austin*	Chair of Board
June 2004	Fred Edwards	Lloyd Austin*	John Mayhew	Vice Chair
June 2005	Fred Edwards	Lloyd Austin*	John Mayhew	Vice Chair
June 2006	Fred Edwards	John Mayhew*	Deborah Long	Vice Chair

\* also Chair of the LINK Board

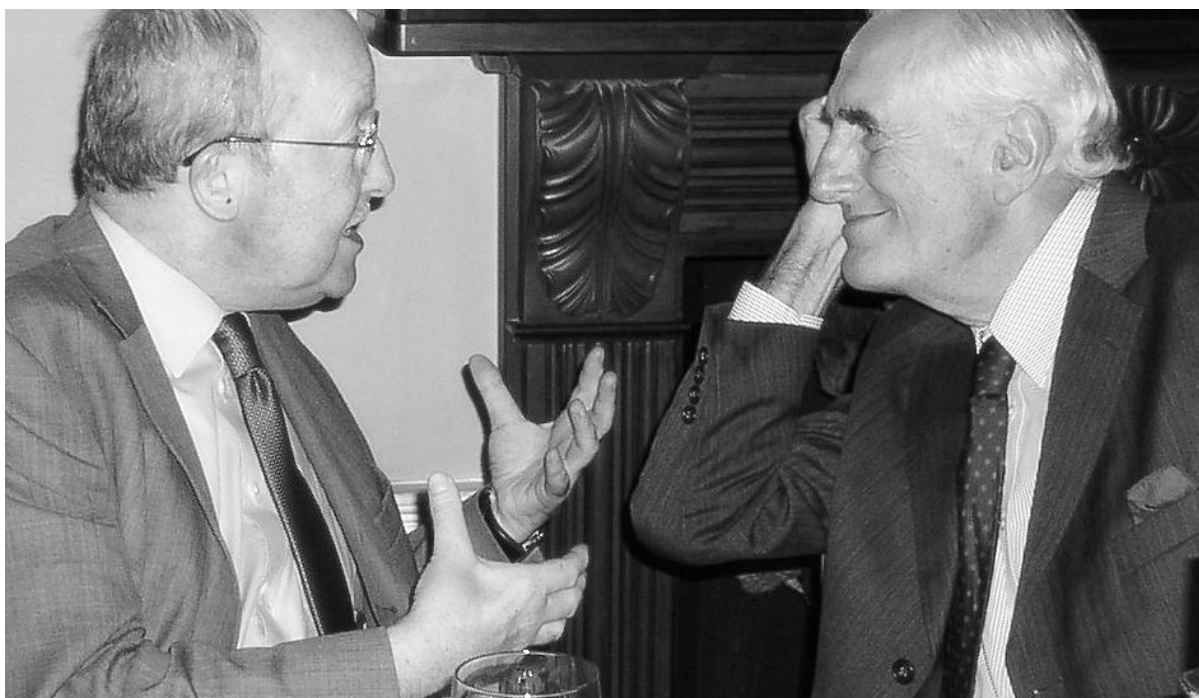


LINK decided to revert to the external president/internal chair model, and in 2004 Fred Edwards was identified as candidate for President. He was duly elected, with Lloyd Austin as Chair (followed in 2006 by John Mayhew from the NTS, who also brings a long association with LINK).

Edward's background with the voluntary sector spanned ecological, conservation, health and social justice issues, and he brought all this formidable experience to bear as President. As he approaches the end of his term in June 2007, everyone spoken to for this report was unstinting in their praise for his inspirational support of LINK. John Mayhew commented:

"He splendidly surpassed our expectations, took us onto a new plane of political and policy credibility, and made unprecedented contacts across Scottish society, as well as being one of the most admirable, charming and inspirational people I have ever met."

Edwards, in turn, is keen to praise the LINK people with whom he works. He talks about the "life-affirming process" of attending the planning meetings of task force convenors, and his "excitement to see these people falling over themselves to co-operate and think outside the box". He has championed LINK with ministers as "an intelligence resource for the country".



Fred Edwards (right) with Ross Finnie MSP at an inaugural dinner marking the start of his presidency in 2005.

### 2.3 Safe Hands

One of the most critical decisions in the early development of LINK was the appointment in October 1987 of Jen Anderson to the post of LINK secretary. Every LINK interviewee for this report pointed to the central role Anderson has played in LINK ever since. Fred Edwards describes her as “a true servant of the movement – hard-working, passionate, with a well-developed acquired knowledge, and so self-effacing that she is no threat to other egos in the movement”.

Over twenty years, Anderson has grown with the job, and her post has been successively redefined as co-ordinator, manager, and now chief officer. From January 1991, Anderson has been supported by Alice Walsh as secretary, and the continuity and methodical management provided by these two ‘partners-in-crime’ has been an enormous asset to the development of LINK. Over the years, a variety of other staff members have supported them. All showed a similar sense of ‘ownership’ of the organisation, and a remarkable commitment to working with the particular demands that a network makes of its staff – even if at times that can be deeply frustrating!



Some of the LINK staff team on a field trip with Dick Balharry at Creag Mheagaidh Reserve in 2002.



The team on the Isle of May in 2007

### 2.4 Tackling the Task

Right from the start, it was evident that it would be difficult to engage all member bodies in every aspect of LINK’s work. Different member bodies had particular interests, and so the best way to concentrate their efforts was through working

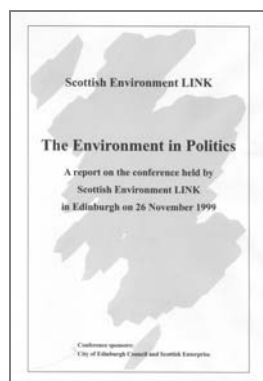
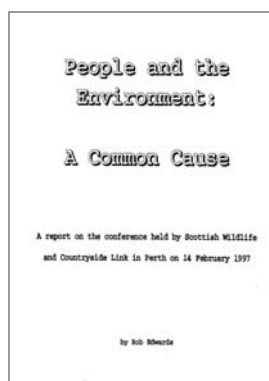
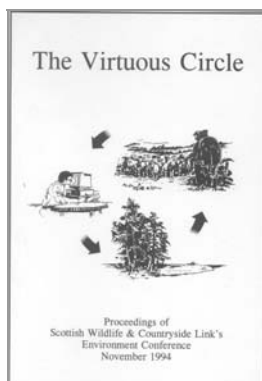


groups. Initial groups looked at forestry, fish farming and the Cairngorms, and others were soon added on environmental education, agriculture and freshwater.

In 1988, the Cairngorms Working Group decided that it needed to take a much wider perspective to fight a further proposal to develop Lurchers Gully for skiing. It decided to reconstitute itself as an independent Save the Cairngorms Campaign – a name-change that infuriated development interests but which more clearly reflected the group’s concerns. Several interviewees pointed to LINK’s flexibility in developing such models as one of its key strengths.

Concerned that working groups might turn into self-perpetuating talking shops, they were later replaced by time-limited and self-supporting task forces. This arrangement also allowed some issues to be semi-detached from the mainstream of LINK’s work. The intensive work required for the campaign against the Lingerabay superquarry, for example, was taken forward by a Quarry Working Group, as told in the 2006 LINK report *The Battle for Roineabhal*. Throughout LINK’s history, these working groups and task forces, marshalled by hard-working convenors, have been the well-spring of ideas – Fred Edwards describes them as “the jewel in LINK’s crown” and promotes them as a significant source of intelligence for civic Scotland.

Another early innovation was the biennial Environment Conference, aimed at least as much at self-education as at influencing wider policy. The first of these in 1994, entitled *The Virtuous Circle*, looked at the ‘greening’ of rural development. It was followed by *People and the Environment: A Common Cause* in 1997, *The Environment in Politics* in 1999, and *Making Links – Citizens and Sustainability* in 2001. Each sought to engage wider audiences in debates about future approaches to the environment in Scotland and encouraged LINK member bodies to widen their own agendas to capitalise on the growing interest in the environment and sustainability. From 2002, the conferences were subsumed as a day of topic debate within the annual LINK Members Congress.



LINK conference reports from the 1990s.

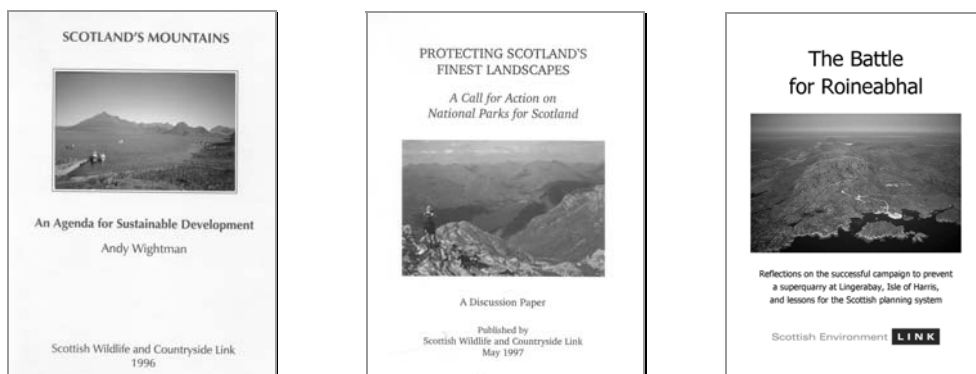
## 2.5 Reliability and Authority

One major tactic adopted by LINK almost from its inception was the production of reliable and authoritative reports. The first LINK report was on *Marine Fishfarming in Scotland*, produced by its fish farming working group and launched in March 1988. Simon Pepper, who chaired the group, says it was a significant landmark. The group had gone out of its way to listen to all viewpoints in compiling its report. When the report appeared, industry representatives pounced on it, ready to tear it to shreds, but could find no significant factual errors.

Another pioneering project in 1991 also proved LINK's ability to pull off difficult challenges with considerable authority. The *State of the Scottish Environment 1991* report provided a "broad brush assessment of the current state of selected environmental resources in Scotland", and, in that context, is still a valuable historical document 16 years later. It also set the ground for subsequent State of the Environment Reports by the Scottish Environment Protection Agency and others.

Later, LINK tried to work its magic again on the 'national parks debate', which had long polarised views in Scotland. LINK had been chewing over the issue at meetings for several years, but there were strong internal divisions. Then the prospect of the 1997 general election presented the opportunity to take the issue forward. John McFall MP had pushed Labour to include plans for national parks in its manifesto. LINK sought to provide wider inspiration for these proposals through a discussion paper on *Protecting Scotland's Finest Landscapes* published in May 1997.

This proposed that national parks should be established to secure biodiversity and landscape conservation, recreation provision, appropriate rural development and cultural revival in key areas. The inclusion of the rural development and cultural perspectives was critical in broadening the agenda, and later became a key element of the Labour proposals for national parks in Scotland.



Some of LINK reports during the last ten years brought the issues to a wider audience.



European national park managers add experience to the field meeting prior to the LINK conference in 1998.

By now, mere reports were not enough: LINK also organised two conferences in September 1997 and March 1998 to develop its arguments and bring in wider expertise on national parks. Simon Pepper reckons that the masterstroke at the second of these was the involvement of park managers from Norway, Sweden, France and Austria, who described ambitious plans for a growth in national parks in their countries, against a history of scepticism and resistance.

Overall, Bob Aitken says that when LINK decided to take on the national parks issue, “it delivered in crashing style, with impressively credible papers and inspired conferences”.

## **2.6 Partner Perspectives**

Scottish Natural Heritage (SNH) has supported LINK financially from its inception. Ian Jardine, current chief executive SNH, says it is important for his organisation to support NGOs as a public representation on environmental issues, and best value for public money therefore comes from supporting a body that will bring all these diverse organisations together. For SNH, the additional value of LINK, Jardine says, is the external insight it offers of what is going on – he sees the need for “a sounding board that doesn’t make a noise only when you hit it, but has something to tell you”.

John Thomson, who has had particular responsibility for relations between SNH and LINK, suggests that public bodies like SNH can operate most effectively if outside organisations like LINK help create a playing field for them, at some remove from

the *status quo* associated with government. A public body cannot break government inertia on its own, he says, but needs a lever from elsewhere: pressure from NGOs can provide this lever, representing an important element of public opinion.

The media are a key tool by which LINK can apply that pressure. In the days before LINK, the environment rarely made the news. Simon Pepper recalls meeting in 1986 with Peter Macdonald, environment correspondent for *The Scotsman*, who complained about the lack of useful press material emanating from any conservation body in Scotland.

LINK helped change that, although it cannot take all the credit. Over the same period, many of the larger UK member organisations gave greater autonomy to their operations in Scotland, and this gave them the freedom to speak out more effectively. Because LINK has to balance the views of all its member bodies, its media statements are sometimes less cutting-edge than statements from individual member bodies, but when LINK can agree a joint position, its impact is particularly powerful.

According to journalist Rob Edwards, the fact that LINK speaks on behalf of so many voluntary bodies pushes its statements up the news agenda, and makes its opinions far more difficult to ignore – even if it does mean that every time he writes a story he has to explain to his readers (and his editors) what LINK is. But he also points out that journalists are interested in conflict, rather than harmony, so the fact that more than 30 voluntary organisations agree on an issue is not, in itself, an easy story for him to sell to his editors!

Edwards is impressed how LINK has grown from an informal network to a co-ordinated campaign-orientated coalition, although he has some concerns that LINK may be getting too close to ministers and the Scottish Government, and is less prepared to be openly critical than it used to be.

### 3. PARLIAMENTARY RELATIONS

#### 3.1 Grasping the Nettle

“History played into LINK’s hands with the timing of devolution, and LINK was ready for it”, says Simon Pepper. While many of the individuals involved in LINK were intuitively in favour of devolution, there was nervousness about how far LINK, as a charity, could venture into a political issue of this sort. Eventually, it was agreed that LINK could sustain a carefully measured argument that a ‘yes-yes’ vote would be good for the environment. That decision marked a major culture shift within the network, and was one of the key stages in LINK’s maturation.

Following the positive outcome of the referendum in September 1997, a number of member bodies formed the LINK Scottish Parliamentary Group, to monitor and contribute to the Consultative Steering Group drawing up plans for the Scottish Parliament. The LINK group rapidly concluded that the network needed greater capacity to engage with the parliamentary process, and applied to the National Lottery Charities Board to fund a parliamentary officer post. The bid was successful, and Elspeth Brown (later Alexandra) – a dynamic, young political activist who had worked previously for a Scottish MP at Westminster – took up the post. The former FoES Director, Kevin Dunion, says that the decision to engage a parliamentary officer made a big difference to his enthusiasm for LINK, partly because it offered real added value to FoES work, but also because it began to push sustainable development messages onto the agendas of the more traditional wildlife and countryside bodies.

Several other LINK bodies had appointed parliamentary officers, and they came together as an informed network which the new MSPs rapidly came to respect. For other member bodies, whose staff had little time to engage with parliamentary matters, Alexandra’s role offered a huge premium to their work. When the Lottery funding came to an end, the membership agreed that this work was so important that it should continue, and six of the largest LINK bodies agreed to provide the funding.

One of the first conclusions of the parliamentary project was that LINK needed to raise its profile, to make clear its relevance to the political agenda. As part of that, a change of name to Scottish Environment LINK was agreed in 1999 “to more truly reflect our role, and more strongly emphasise our place at the centre of the key issues that face Scotland in the new millennium”.



A field meeting for parliamentarians, Blackford Hill, 2003.

To further illustrate LINK's legitimacy, a document was compiled for the new parliamentarians called *A Vital Link: a guide to the environment movement in Scotland*. This was launched at a breakfast meeting in Cafe 1812, opposite St Andrew's House in Edinburgh, on the day of the last-ever meeting of the Scottish Grand Committee (the regular meeting of Westminster MPs to discuss exclusively Scottish issues), exactly 100 days before the first full meeting of the Scottish Parliament.

Speaking at the launch, LINK Chair Michael Scott drew attention to a statistic, put together in the report for the first time, that the 39 member bodies of LINK had more than half a million members in Scotland – one in ten of the population, and more than all the political parties in Scotland combined. His speech emphasised that "people are absolutely central to our vision, and that the wise use of natural resources is very much part of that vision". He continued: "That is why LINK, to some people's surprise, came out as strong advocates for the Scottish Parliament, and why we look forward to the opportunities and challenges the Parliament will create."



### 3.2 A Second Chamber

The arrival of the Scottish Parliament brought new opportunities and challenges for LINK, and it helped solidify LINK's position as a key player in the democratic processes of Scotland. The Parliament was designed to be open (both in its organisation and its building). After 12 years of hammering at politicians' doors, LINK members suddenly found that doors were being opened to usher them in. That brought workload problems. Anne McCall believes that LINK is being invited to contribute to so many initiatives in the Parliament that it will have to learn to prioritise, and occasionally refuse, offers. She commented: "LINK needs to be mature enough to make decisions on when it can do useful work through this system and when not."

The functioning of the Scottish Parliament as a 'unicameral chamber', without the House of Lords to revise legislation, puts great responsibility on everyone in Scotland to scrutinise draft legislation and to influence the proposals emerging from the Parliament. One of the first pieces of legislation on which LINK concentrated its activities after the Parliament began work was access legislation in the Land Reform Bill. Several LINK member bodies were participants in the Access Forum which drew up guidance for the legislation, but they felt that some of these proposals had been teased apart in the published draft legislation, tipping the balance in favour of landowners. Reluctantly, LINK decided to fight these changes, and, amongst other things, organised a parliamentary petition calling for improved access opportunities, which received a massive 14,550 signatures from individuals and organisations all over Scotland.

Jessica Pepper joined LINK as parliamentary officer while these changes were being debated in March 2001, and is highly praised by many of the interviewees for this report – Bob Aitken describes her as "absolutely the right person in the right place at the right time". Pepper herself is proud how LINK gave people a real chance to be involved in this totemic issue in Scotland. Ministers got the message, and made significant changes in the Bill's wording.

Several interviewees pointed to LINK's work on the Water Environment and Water Services Bill as another huge success. As well as LINK's parliamentary officer, three policy officers from LINK member bodies also played a key role – the 'three witches' as they were affectionately known: Caroline Davies from the RSPB, Lisa Schneidau from SWT and Becky Wills (now Boyd) from WWF.

This quartet worked hard to persuade MSPs on the Transport and Environment Committee to take a holistic, systems view of how the water environment worked.

As a result, they won a key commitment in the Stage 1 report to introduce a general duty to promote sustainable flood management – a first for Europe – and, as part of that approach, in Stage 2 secured a definition of the water environment to include wetlands.

Writing in the *LINK Newsletter* at the time, Becky Wills commented:

“It should be born in mind that almost every amendment tabled was prompted by LINK, and the final result was fantastic, beyond the wildest dreams of the [LINK Freshwater] task force, and heralded by MSPs, the Minister and civil servants alike as a major success for Scotland’s parliamentary process and sustainable development.”

It would be useful at some stage to review precisely why this campaign was so effective, so that lessons can be learnt for future engagements of this kind.



Members and task force convenors taking part in a LINK forward planning meeting in 2004.



### 3.3 The Road to ‘Everyone’

Almost every interviewee consulted for this report highlighted another initiative as perhaps the most significant of all the step-changes during LINK’s twenty-year history: LINK’s engagement in the 2003 parliamentary election, repeated in 2007, through the ‘everyone’ campaign. The 2003 campaign highlighted six demands for a better environment in Scotland: clean air, safe food, healthy seas, less landfill, protection for wildlife and wild places, and a reduction in climate change gases. It thus embedded LINK’s traditional interests in the much broader context of environmental justice.

LINK commissioned the Leith Agency to produce an image for the campaign, and they worked with some of the key movers in LINK to develop the ‘everyone’ name. The name was seen as audacious, because it made no mention of LINK or the environment, but that in itself was part of its impact.

As a journalist, Rob Edwards remembers ‘everyone’ as a LINK initiative that he simply had to take notice of. It took account of the combined LINK constituency, but “welded this together into a solid, coherent profile as a genuine coalition of organisations”.



Launch of the 2003 Holyrood election campaign.



Launch of the 2005 UK election campaign.



‘everyone’ event at Holyrood, December 2006.



‘everyone’ footprint collection, Glasgow 2007

Francoise van Buuren, NTS communications manager during the early days of 'everyone' and now a LINK Board member, felt it was important that LINK played to its collective strengths and "demonstrated that the issues being raised were of such importance that a wide range of organisations with differing priorities were able to agree on what action is required to address environmental and heritage needs in Scotland". She adds: "It is hard to know if the 'everyone' campaign influenced how people voted, but it is pleasing to note that MSPs with a 'green' agenda elected to the Scottish Parliament increased significantly in the 2003 elections" (even if more recently in May 2007 other issues intervened in voting patterns ).

Scottish Environment Week was another idea floated and developed by the parliamentary officer. It is a "great shop window for the Scottish environment", enthusiastically supported by ministers, and represents part of the overall 'mainstreaming' of environmental concerns. More recently, Kevin Dunion (now Scotland's Information Commissioner) cites the LINK hustings debates in the 2007 election as excellent, highly professional events and says it "speaks volumes for LINK's ambitions". Dunion sees LINK as "a repository of expertise and agenda-setting at a time of great political flux".



Jack McConnell, addresses the reception at Scottish Environment Week 2005.



Sarah Boyack receives the Holyrood Declaration containing MSPs wishes for the environment, 2005.



Rhona Brankin and John Mayhew with



SDEN event at Scottish Environment Week 2007.

Campbell Gunn, quiz winner, Scottish  
Environment Week 2006.

## **4. TOWARDS 2027**

### **4.1 Back to Basics**

So what are the lessons from this review of LINK's first two decades for its next twenty years? A detailed summary of the comments from interviewees consulted in preparing this report has been presented to the LINK Board for its consideration, but nobody spoken to for this report advocated any major change of direction. LINK has achieved much in its first two decades, and it should build incrementally on these past successes, without losing sight of the first principles upon which it was founded.

There is some unease that Drennan Watson's analogy of LINK as a "bus to ministers" was somewhat lost during the last administration. Ross Finnie, then Minister for the Environment and Rural Development, instigated a quarterly schedule of meetings with NGO Heads, and included a place in these meetings for two LINK representatives. The founders of LINK would have been astonished at such regular Ministerial access, but it is unlikely that they would have allowed the Minister to dictate terms, subverting the fundamental principle that LINK facilitated access for any and all of its member bodies.

While it is too soon to know how the new political administration will operate, LINK should seek, at least occasionally, to reconstitute the "open bus to ministers", and should remind ministers of the importance of meeting with the whole spectrum of LINK bodies, large and small.

The smaller, grass-roots organisations within LINK offer formidable local expertise and a broadened perspective. Several interviewees recommended that LINK should nurture potential new member bodies and offer them support in capacity building, as part of a coherent strategy to broaden its representation. Such an expansion will need to be approached with great caution, to ensure that the current proliferation of single-interest anti-windfarm groups do not skew LINK's balanced agenda.

As this report has shown, LINK has never shied away from challenges. In 2007, renewable energy developments, and especially windfarms, continue to be a highly vexatious issue. LINK members have worked hard to develop a common stance on energy issues, and to promote the need for strategic locational guidance. But the past political administration chose not to adopt this approach, relying instead on the free market for delivery. This left member bodies with no choice but to respond to the proliferation of individual proposals on the basis of their own specific remits, with all the potential for conflict this brings.

However, if renewable energy policy creates fissures between bodies dedicated to the global environment, the natural heritage of Scotland, the Scottish landscape and its recreational uses, then surely the policy itself must be fatally flawed. LINK needs to offer leadership in addressing this issue – just as its founders did on Lurchers Gully in the 1980s – attacking not just individual development proposals, but the policy miasma in which decisions have to be taken.

## 4.2 New Pathways to Civic Scotland

Simon Pepper recollects that Drennan Watson, in one of his many guiding aphorisms, used to say that, when LINK representatives met with officials in the Scottish Office, they needed to leave toothmarks in officials' backsides, because nothing else would leave a lasting impression! Today, several interviewees for this report expressed concern that LINK was getting too cosy with ministers and the Scottish Government. John Mayhew, LINK chair since 2006, recognises that “the more we are invited on to stakeholder groups, the more we get locked into the Government, and the less time we have to *lead* the agenda”, although it is too early to tell whether that closeness will persist with the new SNP administration.

Simon Pepper has a different perspective. He believes that the relationship between the Scottish Government and NGOs is bound to be cyclical, going from aggressive harassment of officials (especially evident when LINK began), to the gradual opening of doors, the progressive engagement of individuals from the network in the political process, a change in internal culture to support the cause, then developing complacency and the need for new waves of pressure to move the agenda on. He feels LINK has reached the last of these stages in 2007.

LINK current vice chair Deborah Long says that, although the Government and MSPs are now comfortable about working with LINK, they have to respect LINK's right to be critical where necessary. She cites work by the LINK Biodiversity task force in March 2007, showing that the Scottish Executive was not meeting the EU target of stopping biodiversity loss by 2010. The report took the front page of *The Scotsman* – and she says, officials are still smarting from the resulting publicity!

More widely, one interviewee who wishes to be unnamed believes there is a risk of a new democratic deficit emerging. He sees the policy community being based increasingly around a “small club” of MPs and ex-MPs, MSPs and ex-MSPs, councillors, ex-local authority directors and ‘quangocrats’, from the Labour Party in urban areas and the Liberal-Democrats in rural areas, who “go round and round a

rotation of office". Anyone who has knowledge of their subject is excluded from the political process, he suggests, whether they come from environmental Scotland, business Scotland, spiritual Scotland or whatever.

He cites as an example the 2007 appointments to SNH: a former director of SEPA, a former policy director from the forestry quango in Northern Ireland, the former Liberal Democrat deputy leader of Dumfries and Galloway Council and the former Labour leader of Edinburgh Council, while reappointments include the former chairman of Highlands and Islands Enterprise. Other members of the SNH Board include the former leaders of Dumfries and Galloway and Dundee Councils and a former civil servant who retired from the Scottish Office in 2002. Only the chairman has had any past association with environmental NGOs – and even he moved across to the SNH post from his former post as chair of the Cairngorms National Park Authority!

Ironically these fears exactly mirror LINK's concerns when it first met with the Scottish Office back in March 1988. Now it would seem that LINK must become active once more on questions of governance and stakeholder engagement.

### **4.3 The Quest For Big Ideas**

It is abundantly clear that there are major challenges ahead for the LINK network, not least in the wholesale changes that will come with climate change. It is also clear that there is no shortage of imagination, commitment and determination within the network to address these challenges. Fred Edwards points out that thinking of climate change as one issue, rather than a series of connected issues, can lead to problems of approach, and he argues that climate change needs to be viewed primarily as a failure of sustainability.

Marine issues pose similar challenges. Robin Pellew commented:

"Scotland has probably the richest inshore marine resource in the north-east Atlantic in terms of its biological and scenic diversity, yet it is grossly undervalued and under-protected. This is an area where LINK can really make a difference, by adding to the efforts of other NGOs in the public arena."

Facing up to all these different issues will require new approaches and innovative ways of thinking. As discontinuities begin to emerge between political vision and public opinion, LINK may have to change its approach. Politicians fear it would be political suicide to introduce restraints on cheap flights and airport expansion, or to press for a system of road pricing stringent enough to change public behaviour.



# Holyrood 'must do better' in green report

Renewable energy policies praised, road plans slated

IAN JOHNSTON  
ENVIRONMENT CORRESPONDENT

TOP scores for promoting renewable energy, a "must do better" for proposals on energy efficiency but a black mark for a massive road-building programme.

Environmental groups will today reveal their end of term report card on ministers' green credentials, saying there had been some "deep disappointments" but overall the Scottish Executive was worthy of a pass mark.

Assessing the Labour/Liberal Democrat coalition's record on environmental issues, Scottish Environment Link judged that it had "played a significant part in taking forward the safeguarding of Scotland's environment and a role in global environment terms".

Giving people greater access to enjoy the countryside with the Land Reform Act was also praised.

However, the report card, issued ahead of the Scottish Parliament elections, strongly criticised the Executive, presenting it with a "Melting Glacier Award" for decking to go ahead with the extension of the M74 and other road-building and a "Dodo Award" for the "absolute disgrace" of the lack of funding for

**BLUE PLANET AWARD** for tackling climate change: "The Executive's target for 18 per cent of Scotland's energy to come from renewables has been met ... an excellent achievement," said Clifton Bain, link climate and energy task force convener, RSPB Scotland.

**MISSED OPPORTUNITY AWARD**: A lack of a real energy strategy means that our renewables benefits are undermined by increasing energy demand. "The Executive has not grasped the need to put more effort into efficiency and reducing demand" - Clifton Bain

**OSTRICH AWARD** for head-in-the-sand attitude to public opinion for rejecting limited third party rights of appeal in planning applications. "Developers and councillors are under no obligation to listen" - Paul Gallagher, of Scottish Wildlife Trust



Greater access to the countryside was acknowledged as a major success for the Executive

**MELTING GLACIER AWARD** for most damaging policy: road building. "The M74 is just one example of the Executive's addition to road building, leading to increasing climate emissions from transport," said Stuart Hay, of Friends of the Earth Scotland

**SAPLING AWARD** for educating future citizens: "Eco-schools have been a shining example. The adoption of the Eco School Award has enriched the lives of thousands of pupils and improved [the] environment." - Alastair Lavery, RSPB Scotland

**BLOOMING THISTLE AWARD** for wildlife: "The Nature Conservation (Scotland) Act led the way in the UK (and was) the first to bring in a biodiversity duty for public bodies," says Dr Deborah Long, of Plantlife Scotland

**GREEN WELLY AWARD** for community engagement: access legislation in the Land Reform (Scotland) Act. "A real achievement" that will promote walking, cycling and other activities, says Ian McCall, of Ramblers Scotland

**DODO AWARD**: for the lack of funding for farmers wanting to make environmental improvements. "It puts at risk key species" and jeopardises hopes of meeting biodiversity and other green targets, said Mandy Gloyer, of RSPB Scotland

**LIFEBELT AWARD**: for throwing a line to Scotland's seas with an Executive advisory group, which recommended a Marine Bill and other measures that could help sea users, says Calum Duncan, Marine Conservation Society

Media coverage of the 'everyone' End of Term report on the 2003-07 administration, March 2007.

Yet major shifts of behaviour will be essential to address climate change. That may mean LINK member bodies targeting their energies increasingly at public, rather than political, opinion.

There is an almost universal feeling amongst those consulted for this report that LINK needs to be much better at engaging with wider political initiatives – on health, food, social inclusion, and areas of environmental justice in which only a few member bodies have been active previously. One way forward might be to establish some form of wider social forum at which key rural, urban and marine issues can be considered. Lloyd Austin describes this as a need to link up 'civic Scotland' with 'policy Scotland'.

Taking up such an opportunity will require the engagement of all the expertise available to LINK, including sections of member organisations other than those responsible for policy and planning. It might also help to better engage chief executives of member bodies, something to which LINK has long aspired, but rarely achieved.

Most of the interviews for this report were conducted before the ground-shifting Scottish election in May 2007. As this report was being completed, LINK members were still considering what a minority administration will mean for LINK's future work. On the positive side, environmental issues were on political agendas in the election like never before. Dan Barlow, Head of Policy WWFS and a LINK Trustee, believes that LINK can ride that wave of environmental enthusiasm, but says LINK must respond quickly to that opportunity (and already it has commissioned Simon Pepper to draw up suggestions of how to do so).

The parliamentary committee system will come into its own in the new, hung parliament, according to Anne McCall. Committee members will need to agree objectives and then work to achieve these objectives, putting party dogma to one side. Barlow believes that the committees will have huge power to change legislation, and says that, as a result, the onus will be on ministers and the Government to get the legislation right in the first instance – and LINK task forces should offer to help them with that process.

However, Barlow recognises that there will no doubt be challenges ahead in Scotland's relations with Westminster and Brussels. LINK has engaged less at these levels in recent years, as a result of resource constraints yet many key decisions which impact on Scotland are taken in Westminster and Brussels.

In the light of the new parliamentary situation, LINK will need all its inspiration, and the best of both old and new approaches, to rise to the challenge of its second two decades. Simon Pepper expresses the task ahead better than anyone:

“It is time to encourage environmental bodies to think and act out of the box, be exciting, take risks, attract attention, challenge shibboleths, expose the bogged down for being bogged down, loosen up the white-knuckle grip on precious old issues, and think of ways of generating new alliances of support for fresh, new, creative approaches.”