

Scottish  
Environment  
LINK

# Annual Report Summary

April 2019 to  
March 2020



## A message from LINK's Chair, Charles Dundas

The context in which we are operating has changed a lot over this year. In April 2019, we welcomed Nicola Sturgeon's announcements in response to the two major UN reports on the Climate Emergency and Biodiversity Crisis, and her [confirmation](#) that they are of equal importance in shaping her Government's way forward. This led to some very positive reframing of Scottish public policy, and some very welcome announcements in September 2019's Programme for Government. LINK has reacted by reframing much of our advocacy towards nature-based solutions to climate change in the light of the First Minister's recognition of these twin crises. When the Westminster elections in December 2019 brought changes to the planned legislative and policy timelines relating to Brexit, much of our work at LINK continued to focus on the impacts of Brexit on Scotland's environment.

LINK as a network continues to move from strength to strength, reaching 39 members and contributing to 84 consultation responses, reports and briefings. The Species Champions initiative continues to build strong positive relationships with 104 MSPs now standing up for 110 species. The Fight for Scotland's Nature campaign has engaged 38 LINK member organisations, 33 other organisations and reached 22,000 people in its work to highlight the need to embed key environmental principles on Scots law, and to create an independent, well-resourced environmental watchdog to enforce environmental protection.

It is thanks to LINK's member organisations and their staff and supporters that we, as an environmental NGO sector, have been able to come together to achieve the level of change we are seeing in Scotland. This summary of our annual report gives a flavour of our year. Much more information is on our website at [www.scotlink.org](http://www.scotlink.org)



28 October 2020

## A message from LINK's Chief Officer, Deborah Long

2019 was year of action and much of it was also spent preparing for what we hoped would be international focus on nature and climate in 2020. With plans in Scotland for a UN meeting of sub-national governments in Edinburgh on Biodiversity and the UN Conference on Climate in Glasgow, these events are opportunities to showcase positive action and to encourage Government commitment to faster and deeper progress in the years ahead. The Covid-19 emergency has meant the postponement of both UN meetings to 2021, alongside the postponement and delay at Holyrood to consultations and Parliamentary Bills, including the Circular Economy Bill and the Good Food Nation Bill.

While the world swirls, we will continue to coordinate and share our resources to work together constructively and to support each other. Our new strategic plan, launched in March 2020, will help us prioritise and focus on the important issues. We will continue to build alliances and partnerships across society in Scotland, looking to secure an even bigger voice for Scotland's environment as we head into 2021. As a network, we know our strength is in our members, in the relationships we build and maintain with stakeholders and partners and in the support we can build across society through initiatives like Fight for Scotland's Nature and Species Champions, the Save Scottish Seas campaign and the Circular Economy Coalition.



30 October 2020

## The Year in Summary: Strategic Theme 1 – A Sustainable Scotland

Since the 2016 Brexit referendum, a key focus for LINK has been on ensuring the well-developed suite of environmental principles, laws, regulations and enforcement, as well as funding for environmental restoration work that flows from EU membership, are retained and enhanced when we leave. [Fight for Scotland's Nature](#), our campaign started in 2018 and supported by members and 33 other organisations, complements LINK's multi-level engagement with the Scottish and UK Governments on replacing these safeguards and funding. The campaign calls for a new Scottish Environment Act for Scotland to incorporate key European environmental principles in Scots law, to create an independent watchdog to enforce environmental protections, and to set legally binding targets for nature recovery.

There was progress on the **Environmental Principles** and on the **Watchdog** function. Both were confirmed in the Programme for Government in September 2019, to be incorporated into Scotland's **Continuity Bill**. We also worked closely with colleagues across the UK, contributing Scottish perspectives through the Environment Links UK and the Greener UK Coalition to UK legislation and policies affecting Scotland. We welcomed the vision outlined in the Scottish Government's [Environment Strategy](#), and wholeheartedly endorsed its vision as an important first step but it will only have its intended impact when followed through with legally binding targets and an action plan.



We are well on our way to establishing a new [Environmental Rights Centre for Scotland](#). New staff started work in January, with plans quickly advanced for the Centre's public launch in early 2021. ERCS will help underpin a more sustainable Scotland by supporting individuals, communities and NGOs to use their legal rights, with better information, advice, advocacy, and strategic litigation in due course.

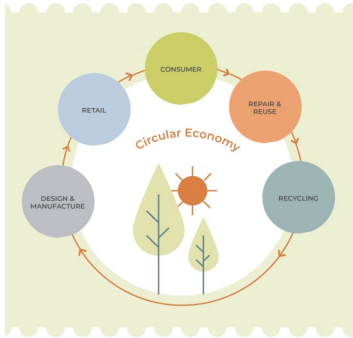


There was some progress on the future of agriculture subsidies after 2024, when the current system ends. We were pleased to join the Cabinet Secretary's diverse stakeholder group set up in June 2019 to make recommendations on **Future Farming and Food Production** policy. Its report, expected later in 2020, will be influential. We have made a [strong case](#) over many years and with others for public money to fund public goods, such as additional measures not otherwise rewarded by the market, to mitigate the climate and nature emergencies.

## The Year in Summary: Strategic Theme 2 - Strong Voice

LINK Working Groups developed position statements, commissioned reports, gave written and oral evidence to Parliament and produced briefings – providing the basis for LINK's advocacy and onward communications. All 84 of these publications are available on our refreshed [website](#) alongside 22 new [LINK Thinks](#) blogs.

Members and staff [represented the network](#) on 52 external stakeholder groups providing a strong voice for the environment across a wide range of current issues.



The Economics Group [Call for a strong Circular Economy Bill for Scotland](#) was supported by our informal coalition, backing our ideas for ambitious legislation. We ran a training day to help frame communications around the concept of the Circular Economy, and together encouraged positive responses to the Government's consultation and demonstrated strong cross party and public support for measures to reduce our collective footprint.



We organised the popular [Sea Scotland](#) conference, *Sea, Soul and Society: Adapting to Climate Change*, held in June with 100 participants across many sectors. This annual event is much appreciated for keeping the ambition of the Marine Scotland Act to the fore, for strengthening relationships between stakeholders and developing new collaborations.



LINK's [Species Champions](#) Initiative matching MSPs with endangered or iconic Scottish species continued to grow, with 104 MSPs championing 110 species by the year end. Champions were variously active in debates, in site visits and in meetings. The initiative has clearly helped to bring about an enhanced awareness of MSPs' scrutiny role, this year in particular on Wildlife Crime.

We partnered with the Environmental Funders Network bringing over 50 funders and members together for *This is Scotland*, held at Edinburgh Zoo in October. This focused on the need for and opportunities to fund environmental work in Scotland, discussions which continue. Our short [film](#) was premiered, later winning first prize in its category at the UK Charity Film Awards.



## Year in summary: Strategic Theme 3 - Effective Network



A major focus this year was development of our Corporate Strategy 2020–24, beginning in May with input from members, trustees, staff, and many organisations we work with. We launched the strategy on the morning of 6 March with a large gathering of members, fellows and partners.

LINK contributions to public policy development through our engagement with government consultations, Parliamentary evidence, briefings and events, meetings, timely reports, conferences, and campaigns, were well supported by members and coalition partners.

LINK's finances remained relatively healthy for core and project work. We were delighted to start work on a new Environmental Rights Centre for Scotland, on course for launch in 2021.

Membership remained steady, increasing by one when we welcomed Fidra.

### LINK in numbers

Work Programme supported by 12 staff members:

**5.2** core staff\* **3.1** project staff\*



with support from our **Honorary President** and network of 31 **Honorary Fellows**

Oversight was provided by

**11 Trustees**

60% core costs supported in member fees and in kind support



216 meetings held with ministers, politicians of all parties, and colleagues in the statutory agencies and civil society organisations



84 consultation responses, briefings, reports, position papers and media releases

**Sea Scotland 2019**

Sea, Soul and Society: Adapting to Climate Change, attended by 100 delegates



**Fight for Scotland's Nature**

campaign supported by 38 LINK members, 33 other organisations and 22,000 individuals. 52 MSPs signed our pledge



**Species Champions**

**104** MSPs in the Scottish Parliament standing up for **110** species

6 Organisational Supporters received the highly-regarded Advocacy Monitoring and attended LINK events



Voluntary Engagement within the network equalled **1,309** days' work or **£365,000** in financial terms

**39** member bodies took some part in our: **15 Groups**, **2** forums, **4** training days and **3** network meetings

LINK was engaged across **52** external stakeholder groups

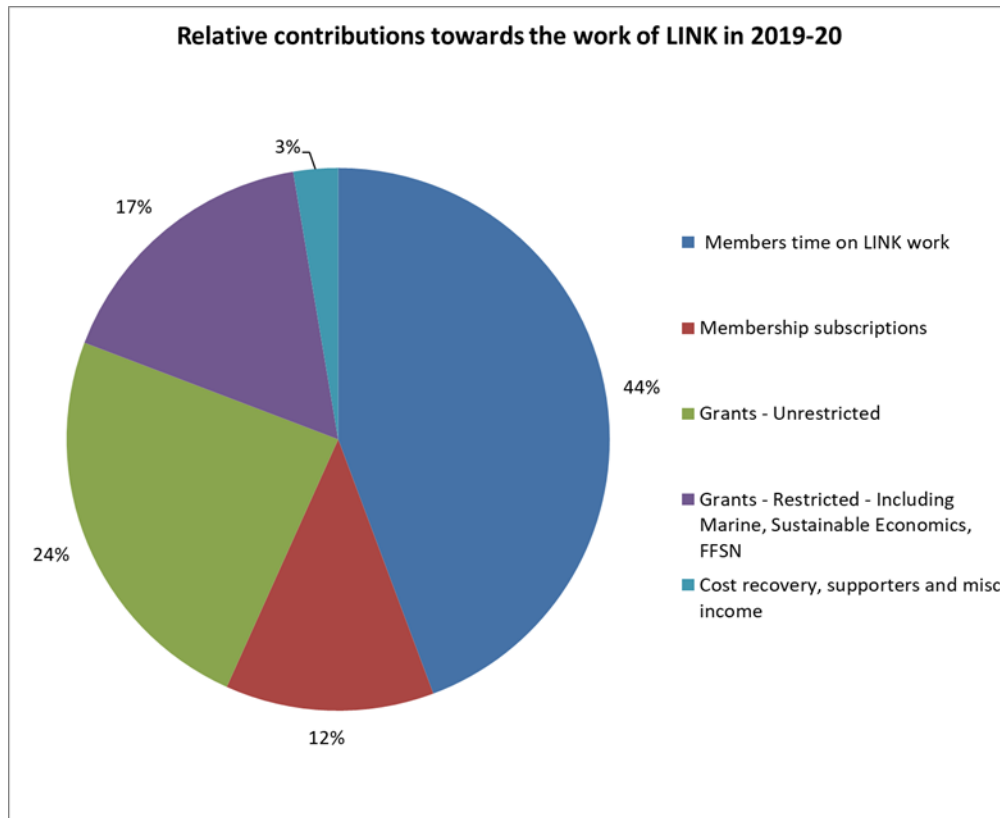


**Circular Economy**  
Circular Scotland coalition of **39** organisations supported a strong Circular Economy bill



**100%** of members engaged in at least one work area

## Finances in summary



## Looking Ahead

The impact of Covid-19 was only just beginning to be felt by the start of April 2020 and has resulted in different ways of working since. However, we continue to work to implement [LINK's Strategy from 2020-24](#). Our ambition is high – for Scotland's environment to be connected, restored and resilient. The strategy identifies what LINK will do to support the transformative changes required in Scotland and beyond, to address the climate and nature crises. Over the coming years we will be working more with other stakeholders and partners in wider coalitions to maximise the expertise and resources we can all bring to tackling these global, world-changing issues. We will invest in building support with other sectors across LINK's priority areas of Land, Sea and Society for measures to realise a green and equitable society.

We know that our contributions are appreciated by those developing public policy and legislation, and in many cases our suggestions are adopted. The difficulties, as always, are in translating good policies into practice. We remain deeply concerned about the wide gap between the rhetoric of intention and the reality of delivery, particularly for nature recovery. We will strengthen our communications to show the high levels of public support for nature, to encourage decision-makers to act.

Funding for environmental work in Scotland is a key concern, even more so since the pandemic. Following October 2019's joint meeting with funders – *This is Scotland*, reported on earlier – we regularly meet funders including the National Heritage Lottery Fund, NatureScot and Scottish Government to jointly consider priorities and explore ways to leverage more resources.

## Thanks to LINK Funders

All of our work is underpinned by member and supporter subscriptions, additional financial contributions and voluntary time from members, supporters and honorary officers, which together account for over 60% of total contributions. We are very grateful to all LINK's core and project funders over the period

Esmée Fairbairn Foundation, Craignish Trust, Friends Provident Foundation, John Ellerman Foundation, Joseph Rowntree Charitable Trust, Juliette Gordon, NatureScot, Mamas & Papas plastic bag tax, Marine Protected Areas Fighting Fund, SEPA, Scottish Government, Tay Charitable Trust, William Grant Foundation, WWF UK.



## Thanks to LINK members and supporters



Scottish Environment LINK the voice for Scotland's environment



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