



Scottish
Environment
LINK

Annual Report Summary
April 2022 to March 2023

Image: (c) Simon Jones

A message from LINK's Chair, Charles Dundas

Scotland's environment unites all corners of Scotland's Parliament as a shared priority in all Party manifestos. Scotland continues to be recognised globally for the quality of our landscape and habitats on the ground. However, despite both of these facts, much needed action remains frustratingly slow. Despite pressure from LINK members and other bodies, including the UK Climate Change Committee, Scotland lags in progress towards its targets and stated ambitions.

Over the last year, LINK has continued to build regular contact with Parliamentarians through the Nature Champions initiative, as well as our ongoing advocacy work and campaigns. LINK still responds to policy consultations in great depth and continues to give evidence and advice on all matters around our work.

Engaging with the public through LINK campaigns has become an important way for LINK members to take the pulse of the nation and to create the clear space for politicians to act to do more for the environment and for the future. We will continue to demonstrate that a thriving social and economic future can only be achieved within a healthy environment.

As we move into 2023 and consider our next strategy, we will be building on our successes and focusing our effort where we can build the most benefits for Scotland's environment.



1 July 2023

A message from LINK's Chief Officer, Deborah Long

The world of policy development spins ever faster and LINK and our members are responding to that. We use a proven model of annual planning and work plans to make sure we are working to achieve maximum gain for Scotland's environment and people.

Our campaigns and initiatives are growing in importance. The new campaign, Farm for Scotland's Future, is contributing to the ongoing debate about how Scotland supports and funds nature and climate friendly farming. Our Nature Champion initiative, 10 years old in 2023, brings the voice of nature directly into the Parliamentary chamber.

We started a new Group this year to share knowledge and resources on becoming carbon credible. This Group walks the walk on carbon and in doing so, we hope to inspire other organisations too.

The pressures on our staff and members to respond to the many government consultations and initiatives, as well as provide solutions and visions, are huge. This is why wellbeing and making sure we are mentally fit to face the huge pressures we are all under is increasingly important for the sector. Our new Nature for All project aims to help us all to become more equal, diverse and inclusive. Bringing more and varied voices into our sector makes us stronger and builds the voice for environment across all of society.



28 June 2023



Scottish Environment LINK the voice for Scotland's environment



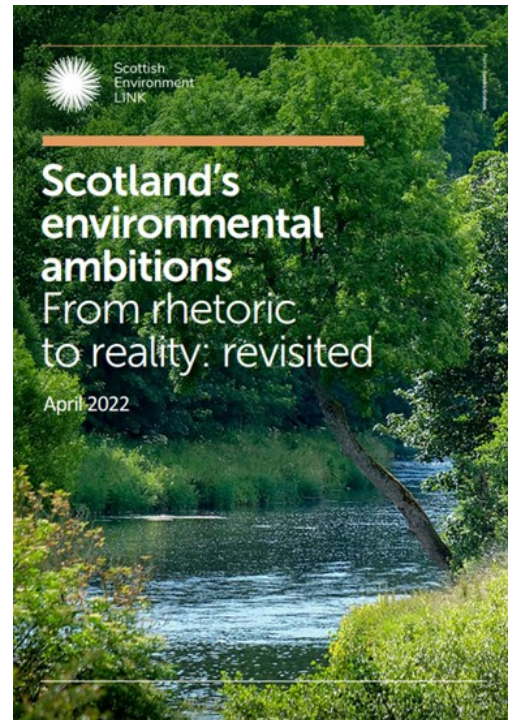
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The Year in Summary: Strategic Theme 1 - A Sustainable Scotland

While Scotland's environment remains a stated political priority for all parties in Scotland, as reflected in their manifestos, and while Scotland continues to be recognised globally for the quality of its landscape and habitats, delivery on the ground remains slow.

The gap between rhetoric and reality has not yet closed and despite calls from LINK members and other bodies, including the UK Climate Change Committee, Scotland continues to lag behind in delivering action towards its targets and stated ambitions. This was illustrated in six policy areas by LINK's [Rhetoric to Reality revisited](#) report, published in April 2022.



Within this mixed picture LINK and its members continue to raise the importance of a healthy planet, able to sustain nature as well as humans. While public support for the environment and the actions needed to conserve it grows, political commitment wavers amid party political wrangling over governance and constitutional matters. A key role for LINK is to bring our members into meetings with Ministers and Parliamentarians, Scottish Government officials, other networks and partners in order to ensure the network's expertise reaches into key policy areas. For a full description of these areas, read the full annual report [here](#). Some examples to highlight include:

LINK's **Governance group** is central to our wider advocacy work. The group kept a watching brief on the Scottish and UK inter - government relationship and key issues including the UK internal market, legislative competency, the UK Shared Prosperity Fund, international trade agreements and the Levelling-Up bill.

Recognising that the deer debate has been mired in conflict for too long, LINK's **Deer Group** and the Association of Deer Management Groups embarked on a joint project '[Finding the Common Ground](#)'. The aim is to develop better relations across the deer sector in upland Scotland to find shared solutions that will support implementation of Scottish Government accepted recommendations.

The **Food and Farming group** is supporting LINK's new campaign, [Farm for Scotland's Future](#) and has provided detail on each of its three headline asks. LINK prepared a [briefing](#) for circulation to MSPs ahead of the Parliament debate on the Agriculture Reform Route Map in March. LINK has continued calls for a purpose clause, effective monitoring and evaluation, 5 year programming period and plan, some principles about polluter pays and fairness. The **Land use and land reform** group organised a Land Justice workshop in July, and then published a [statement of principles](#) outlining our position on land justice issues related to nature conservation in September. The future of forest grant schemes was a key focus for the **Woodland Group** this year, who commissioned a [review of the current native woodland expansion and management options and recommendations for change](#).

LINK's **Planning Group** continued to focus on the development of the National Planning Framework 4 (NPF4). With evidence to Parliament and comments in a LINK Thinks [blog](#), the Group welcomed the changes made to significantly improve NPF4 and to ensure the planning system plays its part in restoring nature, as well as delivering for people. Disappointments included the lack of any mention of a national framework to set out a clear vision, principles and approach for local delivery of Nature Networks in Scotland.

The **Marine group** had a busy year, with preparation of a wide range of policy and public engagement materials, responding to consultations, engaging in meetings, workshops and stakeholder groups, and delivering the Sea Scotland Conference in June 2022. Later in the year and responding to feedback, a young peoples' pre-event for the 2023 conference was very well received.

The **Wildlife Group's** main focus was on engagement with the Scottish Biodiversity Strategy consultation and development of its delivery plan; preparation for the Natural Environment Bill, advocacy on nature networks; advocacy around the CoP 15 on Biodiversity, and delivery of the Nature Champions initiative.

The Year in Summary: Strategic Theme 2 - Strong Voice

LINK has now fully adopted hybrid and flexible working, supported by our increased use of online tools. We also hold 3 face to face networking meetings a year.

We published 13 reports, 16 briefings, 18 consultation responses, 3 pieces of written evidence, supplemented by oral evidence. We took part in a wide range of external stakeholder groups with member representatives and staff acting on behalf of the sector. We wrote to Ministers and Government agencies, publishing 7 of these letters on our website. We published 13 Press releases, 51 blogs and commissioned 8 films. All of our work was posted on our [website](#) and information shared via social media channels.

LINK has been successful in maintaining regular quarterly LINK meetings with Cabinet Secretaries and Ministers. LINK meets other ministers regularly and as needed. We have strong links with Special Advisors for both Greens and SNP and regular meetings with senior officials from the Scottish Government and agencies. This increased familiarity at senior civil service level has meant LINK has been able to open more doors for members and facilitate their engagement in policy development.

LINK's Fight for Scotland's Nature campaign achieved its three objectives and focus shifted to advocacy work around legislation for nature targets. Campaign capacity has moved to our other live campaigns around farming, ocean recovery and Circular Scotland.

Nature Champions: this initiative continues to grow and strengthen: by April 2023, 67% of MSPs were Champions, covering 91 species and habitats. Activity included site visits supported by staff, hosted by member bodies; publication of Summer and Autumn [newsletters](#).

In December 2022, LINK launched Nature Champions of the year awards with winners, Jenni Minto MSP and Beatrice Wishart, MSP.



In celebration of **World Environment Day**, LINK and UK colleagues through the Environment Links UK Targets Group released a [short film](#) calling on all four countries across the UK to put legally binding targets in place to halt nature's decline. A tailored version for Scotland, asked people to tell Scotland's Minister for Environment, Biodiversity and Land Reform why Scotland's nature matters to them and also called on the Scottish Government to set legally binding nature recovery targets.

COP15 promotion: RSPB Scotland and LINK set up a series of briefing sessions from MSPs **around COP15**, from April to September. These explored with MSPs why we need nature, what is driving its unprecedented decline globally and in Scotland, and solutions to the nature crisis ahead of COP15. A [series of LINK Think blogs](#) was created to build and maintain conversations around COP15: written by staff, members, Honorary Fellows and invited guests, these highlighted the importance of targeted action to protect and restore Scotland's nature over the course of the conference.

Save Scottish Seas website was refreshed, updated and integrated into the main LINK website this year. The campaign's focus was on building public support in relation to the completion of the current MPA process, and designation of Highly Protected Marine Areas.

LINK's new [campaign](#), **Farm for Scotland's Future**, was launched at the Royal Highland Show in June 2022. It has 3 asks focused on reforming the current farm funding system. The campaign is supported by 29 member bodies, is advised by three farming organisations and is supported by eight other organisations.

LINK's [Congress 2022](#) launched our new 3 year [Nature for All](#) project, funded by the National Lottery Heritage Fund and designed to support diversity, equality, equity, and inclusion (EDI) across the LINK membership.

The Year in Summary: Strategic Theme 3 - Effective Network

Spring and autumn planning sessions both took place online and enabled Groups to plan ahead and track progress. LINK staff have been trained up to provide support over zoom for planning meetings and workshops, enabling break out groups to function smoothly and effectively. This, alongside use of online interactive tools such as miro and jam boards, enables more members to contribute from right across Scotland, and members can make effective use of planning sessions both for Group work and their own priorities. These planning meetings also help build strong inter-network communications, maintain coordination and coherence and enable Convenors and staff to report on progress every six months.

In addition to the regular group meetings, over the summer period, LINK also held 8 workshops with members to inform our advocacy on land justice, Nature Champions, Circular Economy and Nature positive. LINK's Advocacy Training this year comprised 4 sessions and was fully booked.

LINK in numbers

Our work was supported by:

13 staff members

37 Honorary Fellows

Oversight was provided by **9 trustees**



70 consultation responses, briefings, reports, position papers and press releases

Farm for Scotland's Future Campaign supported by 29 members and 10 other organisations



Nature Champions 91 MSPs support 95 species and habitats



51 blogs and 6 films produced

488,566 accounts reached on social media



53% of costs are supported in member fees and in kind support



Voluntary engagement within the network equalled 1886 days of work or £522,990 in financial terms

35 press mentions



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

43 member bodies took part in our 15 groups and 25 member events



12 conferences and webinars held

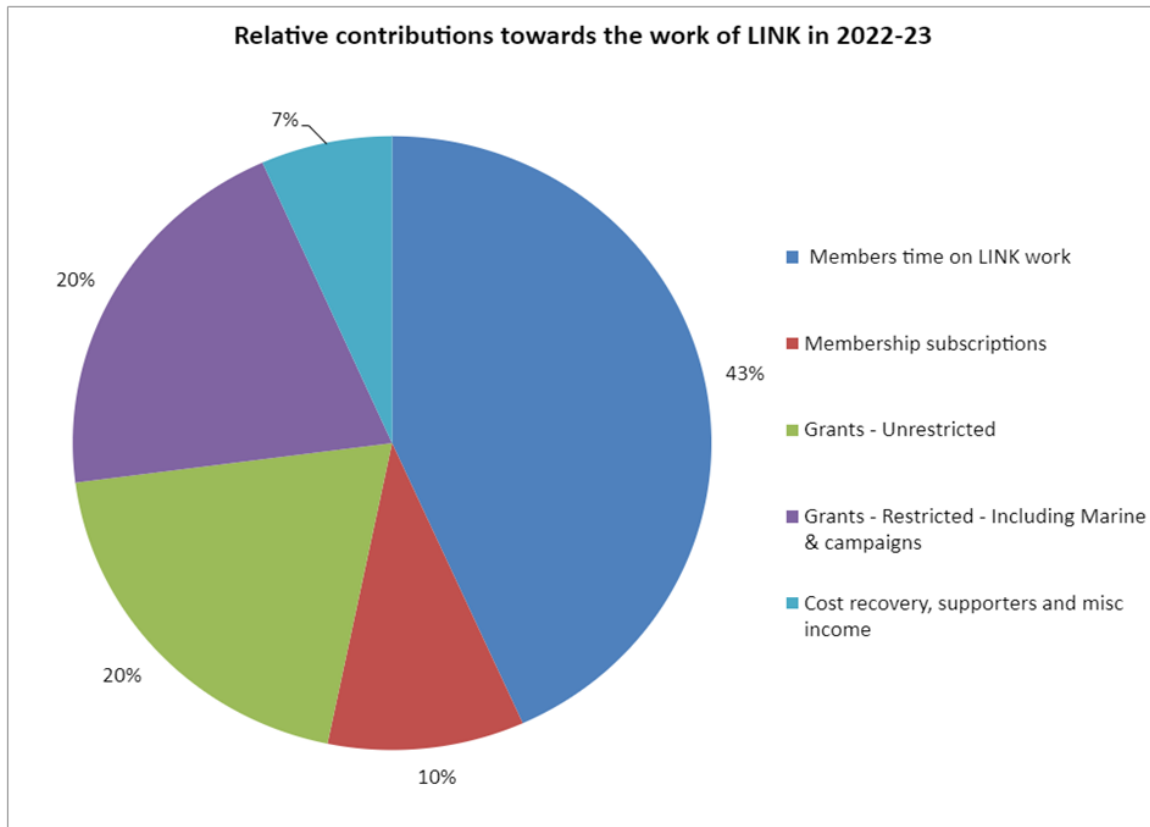
6 organisational supporters engaged

98% of members engaged in at least one work area

LINK was engaged across 52 external stakeholder groups



Finances in summary



LINK's full annual account and reports are available on our website [here](#).

Looking Ahead

We anticipate that the crowded parliamentary and legislative programme will continue in and beyond 2023. Our approach to group work planning helps the LINK staff team and members identify priorities and allocate resources appropriately. We expect however to continue to need to make judgments on policy areas where we have insufficient capacity. For these areas, we work with members and other networks and initiatives across Scotland to provide support so that the voice for the environment is heard.

The Advocacy team at LINK, with new Campaign and Communications expertise and capacity, will be developing our support for members in wider media work. This is becoming more important as the sector as a whole battles against rising levels of misinformation and false narratives.

In celebrating our Nature Champions initiative at 10 years, we will be using the celebration to recruit more MSP Champions in order to make Nature's voice stronger in Parliament. We will continue to work with other policy makers and stakeholders, offering advice and inspiration and building much wider confidence to protect and restore Scotland's environment through effective legislation and policy.

Building public awareness and support for action that protects and restores Scotland's environment and ensures it is accessible to all is central to our plans for 2023 onwards. 2023 is when we will be looking at updating LINK's current strategy and this will be focusing on identifying where we, as a network, can have the most positive impact for the environment on a crowded policy stage and how we can support our members so that between us we are creating the political confidence and space to act decisively and positively in order to protect what we have and restore what we've lost for future generations.

**Scotland's environment is connected | restored | resilient |
Our society and well being have nature at their heart, benefiting people, communities and the planet**

Working with others is how LINK works. This Decade of Ecosystem Restoration, declared by the UN, is when LINK is committed to stepping up our partnership working, with our members and supporters, and building stronger links with others who are also committed to connecting, restoring and making Scotland's environment resilient to change.

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 53% of total contributions. We are very grateful to all LINK's core and project funders:



Tay Charitable Trust, Marine Protected Areas Fighting Fund, National Lottery Heritage Fund

And our members: Woodland Trust, RSPB Scotland, WWF Scotland also supported LINK work.

Thanks to LINK members and supporters



Thanks to LINK's supporters

