

Wildlife and Countryside Link submission to the Environmental Audit Committee on the inquiry into wildlife crime

Wildlife and Countryside Link (Link) brings together 37 voluntary organisations concerned with the conservation and protection of wildlife, countryside and the marine environment. Our members practise and advocate environmentally sensitive land management, and encourage respect for and enjoyment of natural landscapes and features, the historic and marine environment and biodiversity. Taken together our members have the support of over eight million people in the UK and manage over 690,000 hectares of land.

Many of our member organisations are putting forward their own submissions to this inquiry where they have particular expertise. This brief collective submission therefore identifies five key points that we wish to bring to the Committee's attention.

This submission is supported by the following 12 organisations:

- Amphibian and Reptile Conservation
- Bat Conservation Trust
- Buglife
- Friends of the Earth England
- Humane Society International
- International Fund for Animal Welfare
- The Mammal Society
- People's Trust for Endangered Species
- Royal Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals
- Whales and Dolphin Conservation Trust
- World Society for the Protection of Animals
- WWF - UK

1. We are extremely pleased that the Environmental Audit Committee has decided to follow up on its 2004 Report by conducting a further inquiry into Wildlife Crime. We consider that this issue remains of the utmost importance and we look forward to the Committee making robust recommendations to ensure that the Government and enforcement agencies prioritise it accordingly.
2. We support the work of the National Wildlife Crime Unit (NWCU). We regard the Unit as being effective in coordinating wildlife crime intelligence and assisting in investigations, and strongly believe that it should continue to be funded beyond 2013. We also recognise and support the effective work being done by the Metropolitan Police Wildlife Crime Unit to tackle wildlife crime in London.
3. We support the mandate of the National Crime Agency (NCA) to "crack down on the trafficking of...wildlife" as identified in the Home Office Structural Reform Plan but urge that the introduction of the NCA should not undermine the work of the NWCU. The NWCU should not be subsumed into the NCA such that its important mandate is lost: rather the capacity of the NCA to tackle wildlife crime should be integral to the work of the NWCU.
4. Wildlife legislation is complicated and therefore it is vital that dedicated wildlife crime officers in the Police and wildlife crime prosecutors in the Crown Prosecution Service have the resources and support they need to take cases through to successful prosecution. Too often cases have

to be passed onto colleagues who do not have the same expertise and so the strong penalties available in many cases are not successfully applied by the courts.

5. Regarding legislation, we welcome, in principle, the Law Commission's Project on Wildlife Law in so far as it seeks to clarify and simplify legislation in order to improve understanding and to make it easier for successful prosecutions to take place. We do not support any weakening of protection for wildlife. We support making wildlife crime recordable, whether by making offences triable either way or through another means. We also highlight the importance of improving surveillance of wildlife in relation to potentially damaging activities, understanding environmental impacts and supporting the addition of species to the relevant legislation where unsustainable activities are revealed.

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Wildlife and Countryside Link
89 Albert Embankment, London, SE1 7TP
W: www.wcl.org.uk
T: 020 7820 8600

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