

the UK, which the BES responded to through the Biosciences Federation. The BES contributed to this response by including the need for science funding to support EU policy objectives, such as sustainable development and protection of the environment.

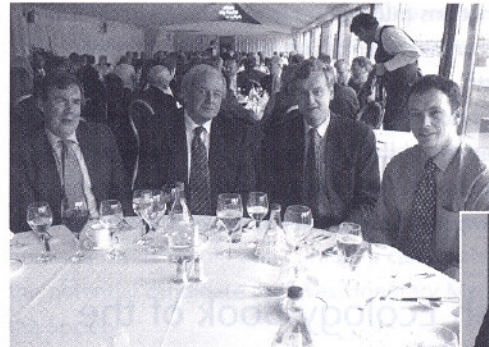
Other consultations the BES has contributed to include Catchment-Sensitive Farming and the Scottish Executive's Strategy for Agricultural, Biological and Related Research 2005 – 2010. For information on how to participate in consultations the BES is currently responding to, please check the public affairs section of the BES website.

The success of the BES in influencing Government depends on the strength of our advice and how we communicate it. There are significant policy issues covering marine, aquatic and terrestrial ecosystems, which will need input from ecologists. If you would like to provide comments on BES consultations or policy statement in your area of expertise, please contact me via email.

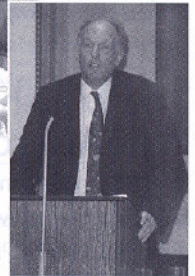
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A bioscience table at Links' Parliamentary luncheon. From left to right: Tim Brigstocke (Chair Institute of Biology Agricultural Sciences Committee), Nigel Webb (BES Symposia Editor and Chair IoB Environment Committee), Jonathan Cowie (BES Public and Policy Committee) and Andrew Lamb (Chair IoB Biomedical Sciences Committee).



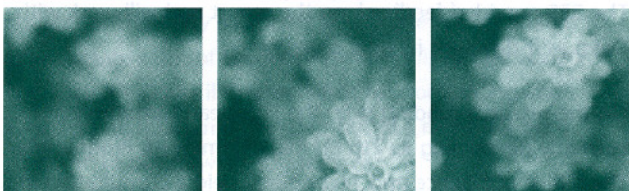
Ian Gibson MP – Chair Commons Science & Technology Committee.

Parliamentary Science Links Day 2004

The '10 Year Strategy for (UK) Science Innovation' was this year's theme for Parliamentary Links Day held on June 22nd. For a decade or so now, the Royal Society of Chemistry (RSC) has been organising an annual Links Day, which has become the single day in the Westminster calendar for Parliamentarians to focus on science.

The Links Day originated as an annual summation for the RSC to bring together those of its members who link with specific Parliamentarians: chemists to whom Parliamentarians can turn should they have any chemistry-related questions. For the past five years or so, the RSC has broadened Links Day to include biology, physics and sometimes engineering. The RSC is leading other professional scientific bodies in terms of Parliamentary liaison. Other scientific bodies have different strengths; for example, Save British Science undoubtedly leads in the lobbying of Whitehall. UK science therefore owes a debt for organising Links to the RSC, and in particular to Stephen Benn, ably assisted by Julie Smart. This year, the BES was represented at Links by Hazel Norman (Executive Secretary), Nigel Webb (Symposia Editor), and myself (a member of the Public and Policy Committee).

The '10 Year Strategy for Science' is in fact a ten-year investment programme, and will have been formally launched by the Government by the time you read this article. The implications of this programme for, first, science and, second, ecology will be profound. The BES Public and Policy Committee may well be anxious to ensure that the Office of Science and Technology, the Council for Science



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and Technology, Departmental Scientific Advisors as well as Parliamentarians on the Parliamentary Scientific Committee (of which the BES is a member) know of the Society's views before the investment strategy becomes effectively embedded in Government Departmental science budgets later this year.

Links Day consists of two parts. In the morning is a snap symposium of short presentations from key speakers representing biology, chemistry, physics and science generally, together with Parliamentary speakers from both Houses and the Government. The lunch that follows enables considerable networking and a few more speeches on science policy-making and implementing.

This year's Links speeches were all positive and welcoming. Science is likely to receive a major boost in funding that will return us to real-term levels of Governmental investment (GERD as it is called) not seen since the mid-1980s before the Heseltine cuts. In other words, the size of the British science pie will significantly increase. Not surprisingly, the morning Links speeches were universally laudatory of the Government's stance. Dr Simon Campbell spoke for chemistry, Dr Julia King for physics, Lord Broers for engineering, Prof Julia Goodfellow for biology and Save British Science's Dr Peter Cotgreave for science. Though the presentations were upbeat, concerns over research scientist careers and school education became apparent and independently repeated in a number of speeches. There is much concern that universities are so commercially-driven that they find it necessary to axe costly science teaching in favour of more economical courses.

The morning speakers from Westminster were: Ian Gibson, Commons; Lord Winston, Lords; and David King, the Government. There was even a video message from Tony Blair. Lord Sainsbury, the Science Minister spoke after lunch. Two themes emerged. First, this investment strategy represents the Government's science commitment to forging a 'knowledge-based economy' (there will separately be an education commitment). It goes a long way to meeting the UK's contribution to the EU heads of Government target of devoting 3% of GDP to R&D by 2010. (Currently the EU invests less than 1%.) The rest of the contribution must come from industry and commerce (funding known as BERD). Worldwide, BERD tends to follow GERD after a few years (subject to caveats such as policy stability), so reaching the target is reasonably likely but not guaranteed. The second Westminster theme, articulated most strongly by Ian Gibson

though echoed in other presentations, was that science really must get its act together in lobbying both Westminster and Whitehall. Gibson, a former biological researcher himself, said that he is now acutely aware of how weakly science puts itself forward. He admitted it has become better in recent years but said that science is in lobby "foothills" and our "noise...needs to become a clamour". The other thing that became apparent from the Westminster and Whitehall speakers was that energy-related science (which for ecologists largely means the ecological impacts of both energy resource generation and use) is of considerable concern. Nobody at the moment knows how the UK economy will be powered in two decades time: such uncertainty would have been unthinkable in the last century.

So what is next? After the Investment programme is announced (which it should have been by the time you read this), we need to see how this larger pie will be divided. Those who loudly present the most coherent arguments *in line with Parliamentary concerns* will undoubtedly get more than they otherwise would. The challenge for ecology is a big one. The future needs to see us with a clear vision and our wits about us.

Jonathan Cowie is a member of the Society's Public and Policy Committee. He was formerly Head of Science Policy and Books at the Institute of Biology. The above report is his own.