



**Friends of  
the Earth  
Scotland**

## **Friends of the Earth Scotland, Annual General Meeting 2021**

Minutes

Saturday 29<sup>th</sup> May 2021 – online

10am – 11.45am

Scotland is currently under lockdown due to Covid-19. The AGM was held via Zoom video conferencing.

Minute-taker: Gavin Thomson

Board members present:

- Laura Curtis-Moss (Co-chair)
- Iain Black (Co-Chair)
- Amanda Grimm
- Louise Bowen
- Rowan Gard
- Mark Ballard
- Duncan Wallace
- Daisy Jamieson
- Rachel Howell

Plus 30 members.

39 attendees total.

### **10am. AGM opens, Co-Chair's Introduction**

Laura, Co-chair – Thank you, on behalf of the board and the Director for joining us this morning. Well done to staff after an unprecedented year. It's been a very difficult time, with huge challenges. Fingers crossed we're starting to come out of Covid now. The team has done a fantastic job keeping everything going. We've managed to pivot to doing a lot of things online. I'm really proud to be a volunteer for this organisation.

Iain, Co-chair - We had a remarkable year by any objective measure. We raised over £1m for the first time, with significant reserves.

Staff are often working tirelessly, in and outside of the organisation.

The core of what FoES does is build coalitions, building movements. Coalitions are built on, and built by, friendship. I often reflect on what it means to be a 'friend of the earth'. Friends are kind, generous, they share interests, we're respectful, forgiving, but can tell each other the truth. 'Earth' helps us to remember there is more that unites us than divides us, we all live off the land.

### **Approval of Minutes and report of 2020 AGM**

18 votes for, 5 abstain. Minutes approved.

### **Financial Report and Accounts for 2020; Appointment of Auditor**

Presentation by Amanda Grimm. Amanda has been the treasurer since June last year.

This presentation looks at the state of FoES' finances at 2020 year-end, signed off by the board at the meeting earlier this month. It was shared with attendees in advance of this morning's AGM. FoES financial year aligns with the calendar year so year end was December 2020.

Financially it was a very successful year. The total income at year end was £1.3m, the total expenditure was £838k. Net movement of funds was £480k, that's the amount by which FoES' resources increased since 2019.

Grants received for charitable activities constituted the largest contributor to FoES' income, as has been the case for previous years. In 2020, 'grants received for charitable activities' made up almost 75% of FoES total income, compared with just over 50% in 2019. This is largely due to grant income increasing significantly rather than other income decreasing.

'Donations and legacies' was 26% in 2020, compared with 41% in 2019.

In 2020, the team grew to 20 directly employed staff, compared to 16 in 2019. This led to a corresponding rise in staff costs. Staff costs for work that directly furthers our charitable objectives, was the largest expenditure, at £473k in 2020.

Another relatively large category of expenditure is 'campaigning and events'. This increased by £19k compared with 2019, which shows how much FoES was successful in organising online.

The most recent management accounts show that FoES has received more income and spent less than expected by this point in the year. So the 2021 finances are in a good state.

Amanda recommends that the membership votes to confirm Thomson Cooper as the auditors.

Vote on auditors: 22 votes for, 1 abstain. Thomson Cooper confirmed as auditors for 2021.

### **Director's report**

Richard Dixon: It's lovely to see you all. I'm sorry that for the second year, we're not able to sit next to one another and have lunch together. We've had a growing team this year, and we now work with some people that we've never actually met in person. As you've heard, we have more staff and more income than ever.

That's partly because COP has been coming to town for two years and funders are interested in that, it's partly because of our work on Oil + Gas, but it's also partly because we're doing the right things and are attracting funders.

Over the last year we've created an alliance for a Just and Green Recovery – that's over 100 organisations from civil society. We've helped 4 committees of the Scottish Parliament conclude that the Government's climate plan is very far from being up to the job.

We don't yet know what's going to happen at COP in November, it's unclear what the Covid measures will be. Our staff has been booking accommodation and venues and we still don't know if it will be used.

We've had some success on incineration. We finally got a commitment from the SNP that they'll review the role of incineration. The goal now is stop that being a pointless review – two years of thinking about it while no incineration is halted – and turn it into a ban.

On air pollution, for the first time we met air pollution legal limits. But that's because Covid-19 restrictions took traffic off our roads for a few months. But that's not going to last, so we have a big agenda of work on traffic, on cars and on buses.

On divestment, just in the last few weeks, we've seen the Church of Scotland, Edinburgh University and Glasgow City Council all agree to divest after many years of campaigning. GCC councillors don't decide the pension investments, so we need Strathclyde Pension Fund to make good on this commitment.

Our just transition work goes from strength to strength. We undertook a workers survey which has shown the discontent within the oil and gas workforce, and their willingness – if they can – to move into green jobs. So we're working on what those barriers are.

Young Friends of the Earth Scotland worked with other groups on a voter drive campaign, to encourage young people to register to vote.

We are developing a major programme of work on Oil and Gas. We've got significant funding for that, we're part of the UK court case that you may have heard about, which is challenging the UK Government on its support for the oil industry.

I wanted to do something a bit reflective, and just think about the phases we've been through of environmental activism. I think we're in the 3<sup>rd</sup> phase.

The 1<sup>st</sup> phase was perhaps the 50s, 60s, 70s, where people had to argue that there was a problem at all.

We came into being in 1971, and in 1978 we became Friends of the Earth Scotland.

In the 80s there was some recognition. There were regional agreements in Europe about acid rain, there were global agreements about ozone depletion. In the early 90s, there was the Earth Summit but this didn't have much impact on domestic policies.

It was only in 1995 that the Scottish Environment Protection Agency was created. Only in 2007 was the first commitment to emission reduction made. In 2009, the first Climate Act.

So, the first phase was denial. The second phase was token recognition with some action, and we're still mostly in that second phase but a new dimension is the co-

option of environmental language.

It's now a crowded space. Where we used to be the only voice calling for action on climate change, now every company, every politician is making claims about what they'll do to save the world. It makes it harder for us to have the cut through, and say, "Hang on, your plans won't work".

We need to cut through the greenwash, challenge politicians and big companies on their commitments which don't actually mean anything.

Oil + Gas and the just transition are going to be really big messages from us through this year and into next year. The oil industry is telling you it's serious about climate change; it's not. It's saying it's serious about a just transition; it's not. And it's saying it wants carbon capture and storage and some of our environmental allies are even supportive of that. We will be at the forefront of criticising these claims. Thanks very much.

### **Q&A with co-Chairs, Treasurer & Director**

Kathleen: Why have we to challenge the term "net zero"?

Richard: Clearly what the planet needs is for there to be no carbon emissions. So that means zero emissions, sometimes we call that "real zero" to differentiate it from "net zero".

Net zero means we will continue to emit but you'll do some other stuff to take those emissions out of the atmosphere. If that all works, that might be ok. But the "net zero" – the bit you're taking out, involves technologies like carbon capture + storage which is very expensive and a big distraction.

It can also involve paying countries to plant trees, so you get into a new phase of imperialism where rich countries pay poor countries to plant trees to maintain the status quo. These tree planting projects often displace people.

In Scotland, BECCS - Bioenergy with carbon capture and storage – will involve homogenous spruce planting. Bioenergy means using a huge number of trees to get very little energy.

"Net zero" is often a cover for companies and politicians who are going to do what they want to do anyway, buying time. Our goal is real zero, not net zero.

Alastair Moodie: Volume house builders are still using out-of-date technology. Are FoES going to challenge this?

Richard: Absolutely. There are political barriers to this as politicians aren't motivated by cutting ribbons outside new housing estates, compared to more picturesque infrastructure. But it's important for climate change and fuel poverty.

ScotGov committed £1.6bn in improvements for homes last year. Current legislation is that house builders cant install gas boilers from 2023.

We need to normalise air-source heat pumps, so people know what they are and it seems a sensible choice.

Mary Henderson: Can we change the building regulations?

Richard: There is a periodic review, so there is an opportunity.

The big challenge is existing homes, but the Government is seeing this as a job creation area, a social welfare area, as well as a carbon reduction area.

Peter Peacock: Are plans to expose and challenge greenwash just about oil and gas, or about other sectors too?

Richard: You're quite right, there are plenty of other areas in which greenwash is prevalent. For example, the Scottish National Investment Bank had an early promise for the bank to be 'green' and not lend to unsustainable projects. On the transport front, we've had a lot of greenwash talk about how electric vehicles will solve the problem.

Where we see greenwash, in any area, we will certainly say something about it.

Louise Grimm: So many people pull over with their engine running. Does FOES still have a campaign to get that reduced?

Richard: There is a power that councils have, to fine people for idling their engine unnecessarily. Some councils do use this occasionally, but most don't.

So it's very patchy. I'm sure it's something we will return to again, survey local authorities and secure media coverage for how this is a power that exists and councils can use it.

Duncan Wallace: At the end of last year, there was a new Auditor General in Scotland who announced that all public bodies in Scotland on what they're doing on climate change. How useful is this?

Richard: Yes that was very encouraging, but I have yet to see anything else on that, or get an understanding of what that means. The Auditor General is very powerful so it was very encouraging.

It's a crowded field, with many agencies overseeing public bodies. There has been an initial discussion between Environmental Standards Scotland and Audit Scotland.

Mary Mansell: While science has helped us understand and tackle Covid, there is a concern the same mindset can be applied to climate change. – "I can do whatever I want and science can fix it".

Richard: A few years ago, there was an apparent backlash against experts and science. But now it seems we've moved on from this and perhaps Covid has played a part in it. The other side of that is that if industry quotes an apparent expert saying "We'll use carbon capture and storage and everything will be fine", perhaps people are more likely to believe this. Techno-fix science does not deserve this credibility.

We're going to do a report on hydrogen, looking at blue hydrogen from fossil fuels

and green hydrogen from renewables. We are doing the technical work, to counter some of the falsehoods from industry.

### **Election of new Board Members**

Iain chaired this section.

Rowan Gard

Re-elected. 28 votes for, 1 against.

Duncan Wallace

Elected to the board. 27 votes for, 2 abstain.

### **Report on 2020 Motions**

There were two motions at the 2020 AGM.

The first motion was on re-thinking Low Emission Zones. It came from 2 members of the FoES Tayside group.

The LEZs were put on hold due to covid. But all 4 city councils have re-started their committee schedules and we're lobbying for faster implementation.

There's a commitment on petrol and diesel vehicles. The commitment was to "phase out the need for" petrol and diesel vans and cars by 2032. This has been moved forward to 2030.

The Programme for Government included a commitment to reduce the total number of car kms driven by 20% by 2030. This will really help us in our local influencing work.

The Spaces for People programme, during Covid, allowed councils to use funding from the Scottish Government to take back roadspace for pedestrians and cyclists. This has really helped accelerate some councils' existing plans.

The second motion was about stopping the Jewish National Fund greenwashing ethnic cleansing. The Jewish National Fund which has existed for a century claims to be doing environmental work in the occupied territories and much of that involves shifting Palestinian people off land, taking them to court.

In the last year, we supported an Early Day Motion at Westminster for a debate on the issue. We recently supported our Palestinian sister organisation, part of the Friends of the Earth network, PENGON.

The Jewish National Fund is often represented as a genuine NGO at climate conferences. So part of what we'll be doing is looking at who shouldn't be in the building at COP. For example, big car companies, big oil companies, and the Jewish National Fund shouldn't be there either.

### **AOCB**

Mary: I just wanted to raise the issue of decarbonising farm vehicles. Please don't forget agriculture.

Richard: Yes, there is a huge amount happening on agriculture. Most of it not done by us – often it's colleagues at RSPB, or Nourish, or Scottish Wildlife Trust. You're right that while methane emissions might be more important in climate terms, the transport used in farming is still an issue we should take an interest in.

### **Close and thanks**

Iain thanked the staff for their work in the background and Richard for his report. Welcome back Rowan, welcome to Duncan on joining the board, and goodbye to Amanda – who afterwowing us with her brilliance as a treasurer is unfortunately leaving us.

Iain closed the AGM at 11.45am

11.45am AGM ends