

## **Questions for discussion and feedback form** *Friends of the Earth Policy & Goals*

*While we have commented within the sections of the feedback form, we also feel it necessary to add an overview response, Which is included here at the beginning of the feedback form. This is because many of our comments relate to overriding issues rather than specific aspects of the vision or goals as set out.*

### **Overview response:**

Friends of the Earth, though once upon a time standing essentially alone as a pioneer in its area of concern, is now one of many campaigning groups addressing social and environmental issues. While it is necessary to have an overview, it is also necessary to have an *identity* and *unique area of principal concern/operation*, in the marketing world known as a unique selling point (USP).

The name 'Friends of the *Earth*' suggests concern for the Earth itself. Obviously humanity is a part of this, but the emphasis implicit in its title is on the Earth itself as the principal entity. Of course, what we mean by 'the Earth' is the totality of animate communities and inanimate systems which we have learnt interact in complex and subtle ways: the living Earth. The core of what Friends of the Earth should be campaigning for should, thus, be *the conservation of biodiversity rather than the imposition of technological monocultures*. In other words, allow nature/Evolution to operate in its diverse, slowly adaptive way rather than be subjected to the extreme pressures of human/wealth-focussed technologies that disrupt and pollute.

While this may not be a statement in the populist language that you have chosen to use in many of the statements made here (presumably on the basis that they might communicate with the widest public), it is a clear statement of a holistic core idea and also establishes a specific identity. It is a generic statement as well, from which concerns about climate change and pollution flow naturally and from which, seen in the context of a compassionate view of nature and its human value, the lot of humanity can then improve. To address the profit driven vested interests of corporates and the vote catching short-term-ism of politicians, as well as to capture the imagination of people, the goals of any campaigning group must have a kind of precision.

The change in emphasis from nature to people that seems to come out in most of the statements included here, would appear to dilute the original USP of Friends of the Earth, especially when viewed in the context of other campaigning organisations.

*Our answers to your specific questions follow:*

**On 'Our Role':**

- *Do these statements describe Friends of the Earth well?*
  - These successive statements with equal emphasis would seem to be better set out as a paragraph of narrative, with some issues as central statements and others as side comments on, for instance, the place of the UK FoE in the world set up and a little bit about its history.
  - We made a strong point in our preamble above about about the friends of the Earth traditional focus on the environment and the shift to focus on people. For this reason we find the first statement in the role rather vague and directionless.
- *What do you like about them? What do you dislike? What's missing?*
  - Our overview above suggests what we think about the “role statement” and what we like, dislike and what we think is missing.
  - Wouldn't 'helping people living with the impact of environmental destruction' mean a major change in direction/emphasis? Given the issues of resource limitations shouldn't the emphasis still be on lobbying for better environmental policy and practice ? We think that a major aspect of the FOE role should be in telling the story of environmental destruction, which often *results* in social injustice. Big organisations like Oxfam, who focus on people as we know, have been talking about climate change for some time.
  - Clearly a strong view has been reached that Friends of the Earth must make a great effort to appeal to "ordinary people". While this may be the case, its over emphasis can seem to be quite patronising. Consequently the role statement seems to lack inspiration and teeth.
  - Comments on individual statements (1 to 7)
    - (4) "Solid evidence" depends very much on context. The Daily Mail, for example, doesn't lie, but it uses a deliberately manipulated context. Why make such a big deal of solid evidence?
    - (7) "We succeed in..." Why brag?, also duplicates “winning change” in (2)

**On the two versions of 'Our Vision ':**

- *Do you like or dislike these descriptions of the world we're aiming for?*
  - We think that it is very, very difficult to write a vision statement of a general nature that doesn't seem to be just about “motherhood and apple pie”. Even the vision needs to focus on specific issues, otherwise it seems to aspire to heaven on earth.
- *Do you prefer one version over the other? Why?*
- We think both versions be combined and then pruned heart though we acknowledge the difficulties involved. Consciously chatty tone it's probably getting in the way of real issues.

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### *Vision version 1:*

- "We want to see..." is all a bit gauche, isn't it? Folksy stuff like "equally good shot at a decent life". These statements are vague enough to hide potentially rather nasty politics.
- "creative and downright silly things" sounds pretty gauche too.

### *Vision version 2:*

- "lead a thrilling life" see the comments above on gaucheness
- Also just to emphasise the point "a life where successful people, businesses and countries *get to the top* without stepping on other people or trashing nature in the process" seems a bit of a contradiction in itself that could be interpreted as endorsing a highly competitive society.

### **For each of the Goals:**

- *How would you feel if Friends of the Earth made this their main goal?*
- *What do you think external people/the public would think of the goal and what would it say about us to them?*
- *How do you think this goal would affect the way you campaigned/worked as a group and what would you need in order to bring this goal to life in your work?*
- *Do you like any of the expressions better than others? Is there particular language you like or dislike?*
- *What improvements, if any could you make to the goal as they are so far?*
- *What were the scores from the group voting?*

*We have tried to address some of these questions:*

### **Goal 1:**

- Once again a shift from 'the Earth' to 'people' as the principal focus. These are almost exclusively people orientated goals with 'nature destruction' in its own right only coming third.
- **Headline:** "undamaged" is a vague word. What does it mean?
- **Point 2:** Presumably FoE is focussing on activities in the UK here? But then the next line includes 'around the world'. Presumably the goals focus on what is done in the UK (local) that affects the UK and/or the world (global).
- **Point 3:** Who establishes what is a fair share?

### **Goal 2:**

- Probably the best statement, but should be "...to put nature and people at their heart" to align with our overview opinions above about emphasis on nature.
- While the overview goal is good, the points below are not clearly distinct and seem a bit repetitive.
- The qualifiers "disruptive" and "principled" are respectively antagonistic and patronising. Best drop the qualifiers.

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- none of the points addresses the core problems of economics and politics, respectively: conventional economic theory is based on the dual fallacies of growth and the presumption that resources are inexhaustible and politicians adopt short-term media driven responses to populist causes while important long-term issues drift.
- The strength of this goal is its emphasis on economic and political systems, it needs a more concise collaboration.

### **Goal 3:**

- This is potentially a good goals set, though "good shape" is vague and (potentially) a weak goal
- it seems to imply a longer term "continuous improvement" approach to the Environment rather than putting things right on the 15 year timescale.
- It starts off with a statement about the environment, but the focus of each point returns to peoples' needs.
- They become social rather than environmental goals.
- Once again the points seem unnecessarily repetitious.

### **Any other thoughts to add?**

Our 'further thoughts' are effectively included in the overview preamble at the beginning of this response. The comments we have made may seem overly critical of something which is clearly still in draft and probably reflects the combining of many diverse opinions/ideas. We do not underestimate the difficulty of coming to effective conclusions in such a searching exercise, but would urge a further careful analysis of what the overview position and fields of endeavour that friends of the Earth would like to take up should be.

The current FoE website demonstrates a breath of concern that is thoroughly commendable, but the danger is that the organisation spreads itself too thinly and as a consequence blurs its image. When considering the promotion of the organisation, we would recommend a return to basics and a revisiting of the name "Friends of the Earth" and what it actually means.

There is a further point, probably not strictly part of this exercise, but it is to do with how a given organisation sees itself in relation to peers. In a society with multiple social and environmental groups, the campaigns can quite seriously overlap. This raises the issue of collaboration, rather than what often seems to be competition. Some of the most successful campaigns bring together multiple organisations, e.g. Recent Climate Marches and the Rally for Nature. Both of which Friends of the Earth supported and both of which gained strength from solidarity between different campaigning organisations.

TGB/Wandsworth Friends of the Earth 02015-0928