

Initial Report from the Board on the Conference Resolutions 2008



Important Caveat: Since these Motions came to Conference in September 2008, the financial situation has constricted our ability to implement the work that had been planned. As these circumstances continue to change, we may find it necessary to adjust our spending accordingly.

Motion 1 – Anti-Nuclear Power (previously titled “Nuclear Waste”)

	For	Against	Abstained	Result
Motion 1	61	7	14	PASSED

Proposed by Barry & Vale Friends of the Earth

Seconded by West Cumbria & North Lakes Friends of the Earth

Amended by Liverpool Friends of the Earth

This Conference:

1. congratulates the Welsh Assembly Government in refusing to accept Westminster's policy for deep geological disposal of nuclear waste, as not meeting the requirement for isolation from people and the environment for hundreds of millennia, through instabilities of civilisations, geology and climate
2. calls on the Board of Friends of the Earth Ltd. to re-affirm that the lack of a solution to nuclear wastes, the proliferation of nuclear materials and capacity, as well as the potentially severe consequences of nuclear 'accidents', mean that the planned programme of new nuclear reactors is incompatible with sustainable development.
3. calls on the Board to consider how it can voice its view at national and international levels and assist local campaigns opposing nuclear dumps and nuclear reactors in their communities.
4. calls on the Board to note that the basic arguments against nuclear dump and nuclear power stations need to be drawn up centrally - with the help of anti-nuclear activists around the UK - endorsed by Friends of the Earth and used in publicity as opportunity arises. In particular Friends of the Earth's expertise in Planning law would be most useful in challenging the novel departures over volunteer communities and decision by the Major Infrastructure Commission.
5. asks the Board to consider increasing staff available to campaign on this issue.

Board's initial response:

The Board recognises the depth of support behind this motion, and the need for an overall and effective solution. The issue of nuclear power like the waste it produces will not simply go away. Our emphasis on climate change work over the last few years does not mean that we see nuclear as part of the solution to that problem, although some may have misinterpreted it as that. Writers such as Mark Lynas and George Monbiot now coming out in favour of nuclear have only confused the issue. There is no doubt that with us that not campaigning actively on nuclear for some years and the turnover of staff, has meant that many new staff may now not understand the issue. To redress this we should schedule a lunchtime session at Underwood Street and invite Jill Perry (and perhaps Tom Burke) to make a presentation.

We are already providing very limited staff time to nuclear work in the form of a temporary additional one day a week of campaigner Neil Crumpton's time (he is also a part-time worker). This is a maximum benchmark for the amount of time Neil can commit to nuclear work as he is also working on renewable and carbon capture and storage issues, so the time is not protected. We should also look at the possibility of expertise from within local groups

We should be able to make our position on nuclear more prominent on our website without it undermining our positioning as focusing on the real solutions. Mike Childs, Head of Campaigns, will talk to Christian Graham, Head of our Web Team, about this.

Our ability to be vocal on the issue in the media is limited by staff time but we should be able to do some work on this (see below). We have done limited proactive media work, e.g. Paul Brown report. We could do more but the availability of spokespeople is an issue (especially London based). We could plan more proactive work, use local group spokespeople where they have the expertise, and require Neil to be in London if we expect broadcast coverage.

There should be support from the planning team for anti-new-build groups and for the anti-nuclear dump campaign, especially as this involves the totally new concept of voluntarism. Point 4 of this motion supports this. This is more problematic and cannot be answered immediately. We know that planning expertise and time is a bottle-neck within the organisation and that their time is in demand from many areas (including priority work on the 'Get Serious' campaign, previously known as 'low carbon communities'). We will arrange a meeting between our planning experts and Jill Perry to see what is needed and what is possible.

Some anti-new-build groups would like to run a postcard campaign, and this could be co-ordinated through our nuclearnet e-network. We could explore whether it could be financed via a Local Groups Support Fund application.

The nuclearnet e-network has had a tendency to be used to share detailed info, which may be off-putting to some, and not used for sharing campaign ideas. To encourage groups into action and to co-ordinate and focus action better, it would take support from a paid post, which could also usefully support Neil. It would not need to be full-time – probably only one or two days a week. Point 5 of this motion supports this. However, this is going to be difficult to fulfil and is at least in part a request for someone to coordinate work. The obvious home for this would be with our Network Developers in the Capacity Building team but they are already over-stretched providing development to groups and in delivering priority campaigns.

Motion 2 – Peak Oil and Fossil Fuel Prices

	For	Against	Abstained	Result
Motion 2	60	8	13	PASSED
<i>Amendment to Motion 2</i>	59	1	22	PASSED

Proposed by Banbridge & Mourne Friends of the Earth Seconded by Norwich Friends of the Earth

This Conference urges the Board of Friends of the Earth Ltd. to consider amending its documented Climate Change Policy and Objectives to integrate and include the challenges presented by increases in the price of fossil fuels and/or peak oil so that:

1. A full understanding of increases in fossil fuels and/or peak oil is incorporated into the solutions for Climate Change;
2. Emphasis and support can be offered to local sustainable projects to build resilience while cutting carbon emissions;
3. The solutions to both climate change and increasing prices in fossil fuels/peak oil do not become mutually exclusive, thus creating factionalism and negating the impact of Friends of the Earth's future climate change campaign.

Amendment proposed by Islington Friends of the Earth

Add the following words to end of Motion:

This Conference further calls upon the Board of Friends of the Earth Limited to consider demanding, as a major ask of future climate-related, or other, international agreements, the avoidance or non-proliferation of alternatives to oil, such as coal-to-liquids, tar sands and biofuels, where any of these are, overall, environmentally worse than oil.

Board's initial response:

1. We are already factoring in the price of fossil fuels (current and likely future) into our campaigning work, for example in our media comment on the economic assessment made by government on the cost of renewables. Also the current and future price of energy (which to a large extent is tied to oil) will be a feature of the 'Get Serious' campaign (previously known as 'low carbon communities'.) We have chosen not to focus on peak oil because we are not geological experts, also access to data is limited (privately held by fossil fuel companies across the world), and there is no one credible scientific voice on peak oil as there is on climate change. So, for us to comment publicly on peak oil would be risking our reputation, and the consequences would be felt across the organisation and all our campaigns.
2. The forthcoming Get Serious campaign will focus on creating political change locally and nationally as this is considered to be the fastest route to make significant cuts in emissions quickly. We recognise that large numbers of people are attracted to grassroots community action to reduce carbon, including the transition towns movement, and that there are strong potential synergies between their work and ours.
3. Resource constraints make it difficult or impossible to campaign on tar oils, which in any case are not located in the UK nor are they being promoted by UK or EU legislation. We do not have the staff expertise or the financial capacity to bring it in to enable us to become recognized experts in peak oil, nor do we have the resources to begin campaigns on coal to oil or tar sands. Coals to oil projects are a possibility and we will do what we can to keep an eye on developments, including through our networking with others doing more work on coal (e.g. Greenpeace) but unless they emerge as a significant threat it is highly unlikely we can do campaigning work on this in the next year or so as resources are being devoted to Get Serious, international climate negotiations, renewables and biofuels.

Motion 3 – Waste and Recycling Campaigning

	For	Against	Abstained	Result
Motion 3	64	8	7	PASSED
Amendment to Motion 3	12	60	8	FAILED

Proposed by Nuneaton & District Friends of the Earth Seconded by Derby & South Derbyshire Friends of the Earth

This Conference calls upon the Board of Friends of the Earth Ltd. to consider:

1. the importance of waste, its reduction, and recycling issues in attracting new members to Friends of the Earth and to respond to more media requests on waste and resources issues.
2. increasing media activity related to unsustainable use of resources.
3. recognising the urgency to act against the current incineration building programme that will obstruct the change from a wasteful to more resource-efficient country.
4. urgently increasing the number of staff allocated to the waste team.

Amendment proposed by Islington Friends of the Earth

Add the following words to end of Motion:

5. not implacably opposing in principle the incineration of non-recyclable waste that has had content with hazardous elements sifted out, particularly in the case of energy recovery via CHP, or where EU landfill reduction targets would make it very difficult to dispose of or process such waste any other way.

Board's initial response:

The Board welcomes this motion on waste and recycling issues. These have always been important and our campaigns on these issues are known to appeal to new potential supporters of Friends of the Earth. The Resource Use team had been understaffed for some time – we thought this had been rectified by having a new member of staff join in October, only to have them leave in December. However, we plan to boost our profile by enabling staff from outside the Resource Use

team to do interviews on waste issues. The media team are helping with this by helping the team prepare short briefings on lower priority issues like disposable bags and recycling incentives.

Ideally, we would allocate more staff to waste campaigning. We have not done so this year, because we are increasing capacity in communications and capacity-building and focussing campaigner allocations on climate change and biodiversity. We have designed our biodiversity campaigns to raise awareness of the unsustainable consumption of resources (especially agricultural commodities) and intend to increase the priority we give to resource use issues in 2010. We therefore believe that we are implementing the motion in part.

Motion 4 – Population

	For	Against	Abstained	Result
Motion 4	18	51	9	FAILED
<i>Amendment to Motion 4</i>	24	32	21	FAILED

Proposed by Bracknell & District Friends of the Earth Seconded by Reading Friends of the Earth

This Conference calls upon the Board of Friends of the Earth Ltd. to consider the promotion of the stabilisation, and ultimately the reduction, of the human population; both within the UK and, via the Friends of the Earth International network, globally, in line with depleting natural resources. As an initial first step, Conference proposes that the Board sets up a working group to formulate a persuasive policy which can be presented to Government and involves as many other interested parties as possible in these discussions (e.g. Optimum Population Trust, WWF, and Green Party et al). This Conference believes that the policy should include reference to the effects of overpopulation on Climate Change, the depletion of natural resources, the destruction of habitat, and political and economic imbalances, and calls upon the Board to thus come to an agreement on what is an optimum global population target figure, so as to enable the world population to achieve long term sustainability. Finally, this Conference asks the Board to then explore and come to an agreement on what would be the most appropriate methods to achieve this optimum population, and develop a strategy for the education and persuasion of the existing population.

Amendment co-proposed by Durham Friends of the Earth and Islington Friends of the Earth

Replace existing Motion text with:

This Conference calls upon the Board of Friends of the Earth Ltd to consider the ways in which global population growth is linked to resource depletion, climate change, habitat destruction, poverty and political instability; and explicitly to include population issues within its strategy development on these topics. This Conference urges Friends of the Earth Ltd to espouse and actively promote population stabilisation measures such as contraception and education, especially for women. At the same time, this Conference recognises that population growth is not the only factor and supports Friends of the Earth Ltd's existing efforts aimed at reduction of per capita consumption in the developed world.

Board's initial response:

We are aware that a minority of local group members feel very strongly about this issue. Motions have been submitted on it periodically for over a decade. While population growth puts pressure on the world's natural resources, Friends of the Earth does not believe that it is the main cause of environmental degradation. The world's richer nations, including the UK, are putting by far the greatest pressure on the world's atmosphere, oceans and forests. The richest 20 per cent of people consume 86 per cent of the Earth's resources and tend to have the lowest birth rates. A briefing published in 2006 'Immigration, population and the environment' is available at http://www.foe.co.uk/resource/briefings/immigration_population_and.pdf.

Motion 5 – Student and Youth Involvement

	For	Against	Abstained	Result
Motion 5	64	4	10	PASSES

Proposed by Milton Keynes Friends of the Earth Seconded by South Bedfordshire Friends of the Earth

This Conference calls upon the Board of Friends of the Earth Ltd. to consider:

1. Establishing a strong and attractive profile within universities, colleges and schools (using co-branding, partnerships or otherwise).
2. Ensuring that days of action are promoted effectively to youth and student supporters (together with associated research/support materials).
3. Significantly raising the profile of Friends of the Earth among young people (as a unique and effective organisation that works for solutions at a local, regional and national level).
4. Engaging young people at a high level in Friends of the Earth (by means of reserved board positions or otherwise)
5. Ensuring that Friends of the Earth is seen as a natural destination for concerned young people when they leave education (by virtue of its reputation for expertise and campaigning successes within the national planning, parliamentary and legal systems, and its grassroots activism on local campaigns through the regional and local planning processes).
6. Exploring ways of connecting this work to that of Young Friends of the Earth Europe .

Board's initial response:

Encouraging the involvement of young people within the organisation seems like the most fundamental sort of succession planning possible. Currently there are three areas of work being carried out. After discussion and review, the Activism Committee had agreed with staff to de-prioritise one of the existing areas in order to free up budget to implement a youth network as proposed in the Motion. However increasing budgetary constraints within the organisation have meant that we need to reduce the budget spent in this area. It therefore it isn't appropriate to begin the new work in this area for the moment.

We will continue with work in the other two areas - our work with People and Planet and our Shout About education programme for 11-13 years. Through the latter, through their teachers, youth leaders and Friends of the Earth's Local Group Education Network and Shout About week within schools, we have engaged thousands of young people in our work over the past 5 years.

Although we are unable as an organisation to fully implement the Motion initiatives this year, we remain committed to working with Young People. During 2009 we will also be testing a new approach. Working in partnership with Girl Guiding UK, which has an established youth membership of around 600,000, we will engage young people in our agenda and specific campaigns by calling on them to take part in a climate research project. In Spring 2009, we will evaluate the success of the Girl Guiding UK partnership versus the Shout About model and this review will help to inform our way forward with our youth and education programme.

The organisation will also give higher priority to the collaboration with People and Planet. This work was actually started almost a year ago but we believe this collaboration has the potential to be an even more effective approach for us in the future.

We do not advocate any form of positive discrimination, but we hope that the measures we are taking will already do more to encourage the involvement of young people at all levels of the organisation.

A further report from the Board on the implementation of these Motions will be sent to all local groups in Summer 2009.