

Fossil Free Highlands meeting

Wednesday 23rd June

- **next meeting on 14th July at 6pm**

Attending: Jill (Catholic Church Inverness), Derek (Highland Palestine), Dorothy (Skye Climate Action), Anne Thomas (Transition Black Isle, Scottish Green Party), Anne (Skye Climate Action), Peter (Transition Black Isle and Highland Charter for Responsible Investment), Kate Willis (XR Fort William, Lochaber Environmental Group), Andrew (XR Fort William), Kate Maclachan (XR Inverness), Lily (Fridays for Future Highlands), Katie Andrews (Climate Coordinator at Highlands Council), Lauren (Protect Our Winters), Irene (Highland Charter for Responsible Investment), Sally (FoES Scotland), Kate (FoE Scotland), Quan (COP26 Coalition).

Context ([slides here](#))

- Taking funds out of fossil fuel companies is a way we can tackle the climate crisis locally.
- Globally divestment movement has won \$14.58 trillion of divestment commitments
- COP26 gives us a great opportunity to push forward on these commitments in Scotland
- Lots of divestment wins in Scotland - ½ all Scottish universities - recent successes include Edinburgh Napier and Church of Scotland.
- Glasgow councillors voted in favour of divesting Strathclyde Pension Fund - biggest local council pension fund in Scotland with £508 million invested in fossil fuels.
- Scottish council pension funds in total invest £1.2 billion in fossil fuels. Highland council invests £45 million. Including in companies

like BHP, Exxon and Shell

Existing campaigning on divestment

- Anne Thomas set up a petition for council divestment a few years ago
- XR Highlands ran campaign for council to declare climate emergency and divestment since May 2019
 - Council set up 'carbon clever' and pledged carbon neutral inverness by 2025 and low carbon highlands by 2025
 - XR have been trying to encourage and pressure for divestment mostly through writing to pension committee and climate panel
 - Demos at Highland council HQ
 - Connected with Charter for Responsible Investment
 - "Council hasnt done nothing" but has been difficult to know how to get them to do more/support those in council to make progress. Lack of information about climate action
 - Katie Andrews from Highland Council said they were hoping to improve on communication now they have some more capacity
- Highland Charter for Responsible Investment - Highland Palestine have been campaigning since 2018 for council to remove investments from General Dynamics - arms company (also has a big climate impact!)
 - Pension fund committee meet twice a year - **next meeting is 22nd September**. This is a key date for us.

- Highland Palestine got response from the council that “they take environmental, social and governmental issues seriously” but still invests in many companies causing devastation across world.
- Highland council don’t invest directly but through fund manager - believe they can make change by engaging with these companies as investors.
- Concern and confusion in council about their fiduciary duties.
- Clear this approach is ineffective and highland council has the wrong approach to their investments.
- Highland Palestine joined with other groups to put together the Charter for Responsible Investment which includes list of principles for managing the fund.
- Believe all council tax payers should have a stake in investments.
- In January Highland Council adopted “responsible investment” and introduced an element of screening. Committed to hold a workshop on this. This could also be a key moment to influence.
- Varying opinions in pension committee on importance of this.
- Made process but a lot of inertia and fear about doing something unknown to them.

Group agreed that goals of fossil free highlands campaign should be:

- 1. Highland Council divest from fossil fuel companies by COP26**

2. Highland Council should adopt the Highland Charter for Responsible Investment

COP26 local hub discussion

- COP26 Coalition is supporting local and national organising across the UK. Setting up hubs in local areas - 16 across UK already - to prepare for COP26 and build stronger climate movement afterwards.
- Priority is supporting and winning local struggles before COP - this is our key moment of influence.
- Suggestion that Fossil Free Highlands could register as a COP hub - have group on the website, direct people in highlands looking to get involved before COP to build capacity, get support from COP26 coalition with outreach, publicity, speakers, connection with other hubs
- Some concern about capacity to be able to do both of these things as well as existing campaigns members of the group are involved in.

Discussion about ways forward

- Suggestion from FoES that this campaign could be launched with a high profile event with speakers/music etc to bring in lots more people and get the word out.
- Would need to be online to allow people from across Highlands to join in.
- Skye Climate Action mentioned there is a Skye climate festival in August which could be a good opportunity.

- Some people mentioned that they thought background work would be more impactful than public event
- Some concern about getting high numbers to online events (although support from FoES, POW, COP Coalition with promotion could likely secure high numbers).
- Others said both things are needed - background work e.g. letter writing and speaking to councilors, and public events for getting word out and encouraging more people to take action (e.g. emailing their councillors)
- Someone suggested that an action people could take could be to donate their own pension to a good cause.
- Proposal that Sally, Lauren and Kate go away and come up with a plan of action including tactics building up to the September meeting.
- Everyone to email Sally with additional thoughts on tactics/actions

Bring this back to the group at **next meeting on 14th July at 6pm**