

Press Release

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“Environmental NGOs still failing the population challenge”

Which environmental NGOs are willing to say anything about population? The simple answer is: ‘Not many, and not much’ - and even those who are, only when pressed and with extreme caution.

Over the past year, in an independent project supported by Population Matters [1], Jonathon Porritt and Robin Maynard [2] approached the UK’s main conservation and environment organisations and sought to get them to engage actively with the issue and impacts of population growth. The motivation behind this initiative was to get these leading, trusted bodies to provide the public with a reasoned and responsible debate on population growth here in the UK and globally [3]. Following that attempted engagement process, we ranked the NGOs [4] in order of the ‘most encouraging’ to ‘most disappointing’ responses received, as below:

1. Friends of the Earth
2. The Wildlife Trusts
3. CPRE
4. Greenpeace
5. RSPB
6. Wildfowl and Wetland Trust
7. National Trust
8. WWF-UK

Jonathon Porritt said: *“One really has to wonder when the population penny will drop with today’s leading environmental organisations. Just a few weeks ago, the IUCN updated its Red List of threatened species (adding more than 1,000 new species), citing habitat destruction and human development as the principal cause of this continuing biodiversity meltdown. More people every year, demanding more, every year, from an already stressed-out planet, simply doesn’t add up. And yet most of these organisations still can’t find it in themselves to do anything to address this blindingly obvious physical reality.”*

Friends of the Earth did take the initiative to draft a new position paper on population and to debate the issue with its local groups, gaining the organisation 1st position. Nevertheless, whilst accepting the Royal Society’s conclusion that, *“It is necessary to address both rising consumption levels and a growing population”* [5], FOE’s paper still remains heavily focused on consumption patterns [6].

At the other end of the ranking, WWF-UK comes in at a very disappointing and unexpected 8th and last position. *‘Unexpected’* because WWF International is the co-author of The Living Planet Report [6], which provides much of the evidence underpinning our case for the NGOs to engage with and campaign actively on the population issue. Yet WWF-UK still

appears to distance itself from that report's conclusion that "...human population dynamics are a major driving force behind environmental degradation". [7]

Like Friends of the Earth, The Wildlife Trusts also produced a new policy position on the issue of population, which can be found (after some searching) on its website [8], 'Position on Population, Resource Use & Consumption in the UK'.

On behalf of Population Matters, Roger Martin said: "*I have never understood why so many of our colleagues in the environmental movement are so nervous about stating the obvious – that, as David Attenborough so neatly puts it, 'All environmental problems become harder, and ultimately impossible, to solve with ever more people'. I'm delighted that some of them are now emboldened to start breaking that desperately damaging taboo*".

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Notes to Editors

1. A series of briefings were drafted relating the aims and objectives of the various NGOs to the issue and impacts of population growth. Those briefings, which were sent out to all 8 NGOs and also the umbrella body, Wildlife Link, can be found at: www.jonathonporritt.com and www.populationmatters.org/
2. Jonathon Porritt is co-founder of Forum for the Future; former chair of the Sustainable Development Commission; and previously director of Friends of the Earth. He is also a patron of Population Matters. His latest book, 'The World We Made' has just been published by Phaidon. Robin Maynard is a free-lance environmental campaigner and writer. He has worked for several NGOs over the past 25 years including Friends of the Earth, FARM and the Soil Association. This initiative was supported by Population Matters, but led by Jonathon Porritt and Robin Maynard as an independent project.
3. 80% of people in the UK think our population is too high; 84% think the world population is too high – YouGov survey, May 2011. Latest UN/ONS overall population ranges are: UK (ONS) 2051 - 67 to 86 million; World (UN) 2050 - 8.3 to 10.9 billion.
4. An Executive Summary and full report of that ranking exercise are attached as PDFs.
5. People and the planet, Royal Society, 2012
6. The Living Planet Report 2012, WWF-International, Global Footprint Network.
7. http://www.foe.co.uk/sites/default/files/downloads/population_friends_of_the.pdf
8. <http://www.wildlifetrusts.org/sites/default/files/files/TWT%20Population%20Resources%20Consumption%20Statement%20FINAL%201%202008-13.pdf>