

Eco Position Paper

Eco Common Concern Network
The Iona Community



Image: Protesting for climate justice at The Big One, London April 2023. Credit: Iona Community N.Austin.

About this position paper

The Iona Community has a long history of action on ecological issues and reflection from an earth-aware spirituality.

Today, we believe that transitioning to a just, sustainable world requires not merely the orderly phaseout of fossil fuels but reorienting the global economy and food production towards de-growth and post-materialist foundations.

Reducing or eliminating our reliance on fossil fuels is only one of the actions needed to bring humanity back into a sacred relationship with Earth.

We believe this is a matter of both extreme urgency and great potential.

Current context

We are living in a planet which is fast becoming unliveable for major parts of the world. We degrade Earth in many ways. Among consequences, we see millions of those in poverty are dying each year due to pollution. 2024 will almost assuredly be a +1.5C world, with aggravated drought, weather instability, flooding, wildfires, biodiversity loss, imperilled freshwater, collapsing pollinator systems and cryosphere, and teetering marine and ocean-current systems.

The collective and cumulative impact of this on humans and other creatures is an intolerable injustice, and without serious and immediate action will only get worse. The climate emergency is the single biggest threat to the integrity of the earth and to human thriving as we crash through planetary boundaries. It is both a major cause of conflict as communities across the world compete for ever scarcer resources; and a consequence of conflict, as the impact of war further increases scarcity and degradation of land, sea and air. The brunt of this is borne by the world's poorest and most vulnerable communities, in a way which is profoundly unjust, since these are the people who have contributed least to the underlying causes of the climate emergency. Conflict is in turn the biggest driver of displacement, internal and external migration.

Our tendency to assume that our solar system is at our disposal, that it has no intrinsic worth other than its utility to the human species has made us careless to the point of extreme culpability. We are destroying nature at an unprecedented rate, threatening the survival of a million species. It is a kind of blasphemy. How can we pray with integrity, how can we live gladly on the earth, when we are so cavalier with our own habitat? 'When one part of the body suffers, all the other parts suffer with it.'

Our commitment

As Members and Associate Members of the Iona Community:

We believe that we are created, not the Creator, that we are a species among species, called to recognise our connections, but also our finiteness, our contingency and our limits.

Like almost all western people, we are culturally embedded in complicity with structures of environmental damage. It is hard to see how the kind of huge change that is needed can ever come about until people see and are inspired to mass action and change in consumption levels by alternative social and economic visions at a local level.

We believe that we are called to ecological transformation – to kinship as a part of Earth, in a communion of all people, all life and all creation.

We therefore commit ourselves to act in solidarity with the victims of environmental injustice throughout the world, and to support political and structural change in our own countries; to radically change the way we live to minimise the ways we harm the Earth;

- we commit ourselves to mutual accountability for our use of money, time and resources, including carbon and other natural resources. This includes our internal commitment to sustainable travel as outlined in our staff and trustee travel policy.
- we commit ourselves to a concerted effort to hold our governments (both national and local), global institutions, media and multi-national companies, accountable for their use of money, time and use of resources (including carbon and minerals). We will do this through political campaigning, activism, protest and engagement. In particular, we commit ourselves to exerting social, political and economic pressure for transition from fossil fuels.
- we commit ourselves to increasing awareness of the ecological crises and their impact on the world's poorest people. Those who have done least to cause these crises are most harmed by them. We commit ourselves to increase our efforts to overcome poverty, both locally and globally.
- we commit ourselves to continuing work for decolonisation and demilitarisation, recognising the huge and unaccountable environmental degradation and destruction that they have caused and continue to cause.
- we commit ourselves to working for mitigation and reparation for catastrophic damage already done. To supporting all efforts at building resilience and just transitions, and to refuse to accept technology and artificial intelligence (both of which carry a high carbon cost) as being adequate alternatives.
- we commit ourselves to honest and ongoing conversations about our food systems, recognising that they often place food growers and food retailers in opposition in ways that are damaging to both health and habitats.

- we commit ourselves to attentive listening to young people facing very uncertain planetary futures, and to supporting and encouraging them in their efforts to speak truth to power and to hold the powerful to account.
- we commit ourselves to ongoing conversations with people of all faiths and understandings, repenting of the damaging theologies and ideologies of past and present. We envision earth-aware spiritual reflections and practices that can liberate human beings from being defined by consumption, and which strengthen us in resistance and persistence.

None of us can do all of these things. But in community, we are strong. We hear the words of our Members in Africa:

‘The sad truth is that we should have learnt from previous experiences about the effects of our small individual actions on the entire globe. But a big percentage of our population is still clueless or ignorant about it. It is not just about how well we live here but how well everybody lives, everywhere. Changing the narrative of climate change is not a one-man job, it is not for the chosen few, it is the choice everyone needs to make.’ Marksen and Fridah Wafula, Iona Community Associate Members, Kenya

And we continue to be inspired by these words of our Founder, written many years ago:

‘Invisible we see you, Christ beneath us.

With earthly eyes we see beneath us stones and dust and dross, fit subjects for the analyst’s table.

But with the eye of faith, we know you uphold.

In you, all things consist and hang together:

the very atom is light energy,

the grass is vibrant,

the rocks pulsate.

All is in flux, turn but a stone and an angel moves.

Underneath are the everlasting arms.

Unknowable we know you, Christ beneath us

(from a prayer by George Macleod)

Contact us

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The Iona Community is an ecumenical Christian movement seeking new ways of living the gospel in today's world through working for peace and social justice rebuilding community and in the renewal of worship. Company No: SC096243 Charity No: SC003794