



Humanist Climate Action

May 2023 NEWSLETTER



Welcome to the May newsletter, with an invitation to meet us at the Humanists UK Convention in Liverpool, a report from 'The Big One', some suggestions for action to take in your local area (or with your money!), and feedback from readers.

COME AND SEE US AT THE HUMANISTS UK CONVENTION



This year's Humanists UK Convention is in Liverpool from Friday 9 to Sunday 11 June, and we'll be there. Do join us. You can find all the details on the [Humanists UK website](#). We'll have a Humanist Climate Action stall on Saturday and Sunday morning and afternoon, so come and say hello.

One of the talks which will be of particular relevance to us will be given by Zion Lights, an environmental activist and writer. Her talk will be on Saturday morning. It will be chaired by Lori Marriott, Coordinator of Humanist Climate Action, and there will be an opportunity for HCA supporters to meet and chat after the talk.



That weekend is the start of [The Great Big Green Week](#), organised by The Climate Coalition, so at our stall we'll be asking people to take part in [Letters to Tomorrow](#) – sending a letter to a friend or child or grandchild in the future or even your own future self, expressing your hopes for future generations if we can succeed in protecting the environment – and your fears about what life could be like if we don't slow down climate change. Please come to the stall and send your 'letter to tomorrow'.

AT 'THE BIG ONE'



Image: Meeting up at the start – HCA supporters, with a member of an endangered species

In April, Extinction Rebellion invited everybody to 'Unite to Survive' at '[The Big One](#)', a four-day peaceful action involving over 200 groups. HCA Committee members and supporters attended on the Saturday (Earth Day) and took part in the march for biodiversity and the mass die-in. The atmosphere was festive with many people wearing nature and animal costumes (including our own Richard Norman as an endangered water vole!). The two demands of the action (which are supported by HCA) are an end to the fossil fuel era with no new licences for fossil fuel projects to be granted, and an emergency citizens' assembly to lead on fair, long-term solutions to the crisis. We are running out of time to change the current trajectory of the climate crisis and loss of biodiversity, so it is more important than ever to urge politicians to hear us and make the right decisions. We hope to see more supporters at future such events, do keep an eye on our newsletters and social media!



Image: The 'Die-In'

TAKING LOCAL ACTION

Can you take action locally in support of the aims of HCA? There are lots of ways to get involved, working with other green groups, or with your local humanist group, or setting up your own group. Here is one example of where local action can make an impact.

Unicorn Kingdom: This fair and septic isle



Image: Sewer outlet (end of pipe solutions)

The UK is consistently ranked as one of the worst countries in Europe for water quality. Over three-quarters of our rivers fail to meet required health standards and face multiple threats. In 2022, a House of Commons Committee report on the state of UK rivers concluded that no river in England was free from chemical contamination. Only 14% of UK rivers had a 'good' ecological status.

Pollution is putting increasing pressure on the diverse wildlife that calls our beautiful rivers home: from kingfishers to otters and brown trout. It can hurt digestion, damage body parts, and make it difficult for them to swim. It can also harm their ability to grow and reproduce. According to the Wildlife Trusts, rising pollution levels place 10% of freshwater and wetland species at risk of extinction. In Wales and England, 38% of fish health checks fail due to diseases caused by pollution.

In 2021 there were over 370,000 discharges of untreated sewage into UK rivers, totalling over 2.7 million hours of pollution. During periods of heavy rain, Storm Overflows (SOs) from treatment works and Combined Sewer Overflows (CSOs) from the sewer network are supposed to only be used as a safety valve for the sewage system. Unfortunately, both are being used whenever the water companies want them to, pouring rainwater mixed with raw sewage into our rivers, streams and lakes.

When raw sewage is dumped into the river, as happens thousands of times a year in the UK, resistant bacteria emanating from the hospitals – such as e coli, salmonella or shigella – exchange genetic material with each other and with environmental bacteria in the water and the sediments. New variants arise, combining in a single species ever more drug resistance. These organisms can remain viable, especially in sediment, for years. Absent, inadequate, or inappropriately managed water and sanitation services are exposing individuals to preventable health risks.

Foreign investment firms, private equity, pension funds and businesses lodged in tax havens own more than 70% of the water industry in England according to research by [The Guardian](#). More than three decades after the sell-off, with a promise the public would become individual small shareholders or ‘H2Owners’, control of the industry is dominated by overseas investment vehicles, the super-rich, companies in tax havens and pension fund investors.

Our cherished way of life depends on clean water: healthy ecosystems provide wildlife habitats and places to fish, paddle, surf, and swim. Our economy depends on clean water: manufacturing, farming, tourism, recreation, energy production, and other economic sectors need clean water to function and flourish. With most riverside towns having a high footfall for tourism, a smelly and weed-choked river may not be the profile that it wants tourists to take home with them!

If you don't agree with sewage dumping in your rivers and streams for profit, write and tell both your local and national political representatives. More and more groups are forming around the country, standing up for their local water environment. This is a call to help these groups, or to work to set up your own group to show that local people care for their environment. [The Rivers Trust](#) has produced an online map showing where the sewage is being released, with figures for both frequency of release and number of hours. The website has suggestions for actions to take.

Geoff Sallis

Look out for more suggestions for local action in future newsletters.

HOW GREEN ARE YOUR SAVINGS?



So do you know how green your savings are? I think I can answer for pretty much everyone (and I include myself) when I say ‘probably not’. I have been seeking to improve the environmental impact of my investments for several years and have found it extremely difficult to find advice that balances environmental considerations, risk and return.

Investment decisions are critical in providing security in the short and long term and are complex even without environmental considerations. Providers have rebranded Funds as ESG or Sustainable with no clear standards of what this means in practice and often still include Fossil Fuel investments in their portfolios.

I subscribe to the [Ethical Consumer](#), which undertakes research in many areas, one of which is finance. They look at environmental considerations within their ethical framework and provide some ‘Best Buys’ with research that backs up their scores.

As a private investor, I have found the Ethical Consumer suggestions very helpful in adjusting my investments over time. Here are some of the funds the Ethical Consumer identifies as best buys that you may wish to consider.

Investment Funds

The top four funds which are all fossil fuel free are FP WHEB Sustainability, Triodos Pioneer Impact, Castlefield Sustainable European and EdenTree European Equity.

For those with significant assets or intending to make major changes to their portfolio, using a Financial Advisor specialising in ethical investments to rebalance a portfolio could be a worthwhile investment. [The Ethical Investment Association website](#) has suggestions.

Feel good investments – but not for the fainthearted

If you want to feel certain about the impact of at least some of your investments I recommend you look at [Energise Africa](#), [Ethex](#), and [Abundance Investment](#). I discovered these organisations in 2021 and have found joy in investing small amounts of money in their amazing projects. N.B. All of these investments are high risk and capital is at risk.

Energise Africa specialises in raising money for projects in Africa. Many of their projects provide loans to individuals or small businesses to install solar systems. The model is simple. A family uses kerosene, which they purchase, to cook. The project lends money, raised via bonds, to the family for a small solar system. The family then repays the capital and interest with the money they save from no longer using kerosene. At the point the solar system is paid for the family has additional disposable income for the life of the system. The investor gets payments of interest and capital on varying schedules depending on the project. The minimum investment is £50.

Ethex is a linked organisation which specialises in projects in the UK. My favourite investment is in the Library of Things, a wonderful organisation that lends larger or more expensive household items (lawnmowers, drills, carpet cleaners, food processors etc.) in areas where many residents do not have the money to buy or the space to store these items. Members can rent items at a social tariff providing access to items that are difficult to afford. The project reduces consumption and helps those on low incomes. Ethex has very varied projects to fund social enterprises at a local level.

Abundance Investment is another organisation that provides the opportunity to invest in projects designed to respond to the climate emergency.

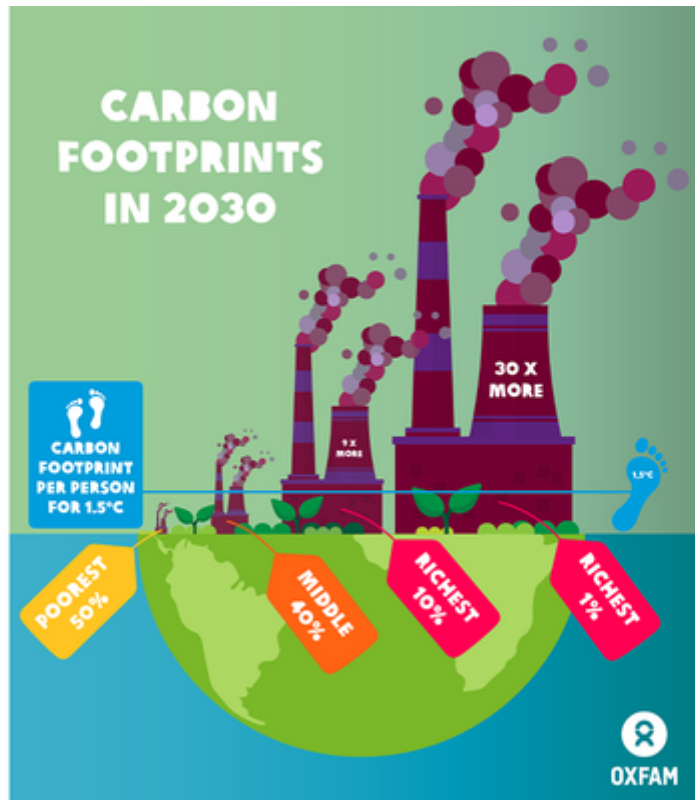
Pauline Element

READERS' VIEWS ON THE POPULATION QUESTION

In our March newsletter, Gilbert Jackson suggested that when we're talking about how to reduce global warming, the 'big elephant still in the room' is population growth. Here are some varied responses.

Chris Sutton says: Gilbert Jackson has it absolutely right. The horrible truth and reality we have to face is that the planet is overpopulated. We can debate the different animal agricultural methods but this is missing the point. There are too many people needing food and destroying the planet in the process. The best way to deal with the growing population problem is the education of girls and women. Please make female education a key focus for your Climate Action campaign.

Tim Purches comments: The issue of population growth was raised in your last newsletter. It's a common concern, but this [report from Oxfam](#) puts a different perspective on the issue.



If we could just snap our fingers and not just stop our population increasing, but halve our numbers in an instant, the effect would be minimal if the 50% we lose are those who produce the least carbon dioxide. What's more, in the long term it looks like the struggle will be to stop population decline and the many difficulties that will pose for increasingly ageing societies. Of course, the big risk is that if the rest of the world starts to produce greenhouse gasses at the rate we do in the West, even without any population growth, we are lost. But that puts the onus squarely on us to reduce our emissions to a level that is sustainable for the entirety of humanity, rather than expecting others to act on an issue that is not really central to the task of successfully controlling climate change.

Jamie Woodhouse, who contributed to the previous debate on livestock farming, says: To tie this in with Gilbert's point about population reduction, it's worth considering that while there are 8 billion humans on our planet there are ~100 billion farmed land animals and maybe 1-2 trillion farmed aquatic animals killed per year. If we can slash the number of farmed animals by ending our forced breeding practices we'll have plenty of space and food for even 11 billion humans (the peak now projected by the UN).

NEWSLETTERS ON THE WEB

Some of you have asked whether our newsletters are available on the web. They are now! All newsletters to date can be found on the [Humanist Climate Action section of the Humanists UK website](#).

CALLS FOR VOLUNTEERS

We are looking for a volunteer for the role of [Humanist Climate Action Social Media Lead](#). More details and a link to the application pack are on the website.

Also, a repeat call for volunteers to represent [Wales](#) and [Northern Ireland](#) on the Humanist Climate Action steering committee. Wales Humanists have been invited to join Climate Cymru and this prompted a realisation that we need representation on the committee both for Wales and for Northern Ireland. If you are interested, please apply!