

Information for New Volunteers - 2014



Friends of the Earth Brisbane is:

- a member group of FoE Australia, itself a member group of FoE International, the most extensive social and environmental justice group on the planet
- an environment group and a social change organization with a strong social justice focus
- a federation of collectives
- a consensus decision-making organisation
- activist: we are only ever as good as our active members
- a registered Cooperative with a set of Rules
- about being active and making changes in the way society is run and know that it needs to be mutually supportive – and needs to be fun, at least some of the time!

Joining FoEB:

There are a few levels of involvement with FoE:

1. **Volunteer:** work on a campaign or around the office a few hours a week
2. **Collective member:** Become a member of a campaign or the office collective and be actively involved in making decisions in these collectives
3. **Active member:** after being actively involved in a FoE collective for two months, you can apply to become an active member. You'll need to pay the annual membership subscription (waivers available), attend 4 Hub meetings a year and be familiar with our rules and policies.

History

Friends of the Earth was founded in the USA in 1971 and has since grown to become one of the largest federations of organisations in the world, with member groups in over 74 countries. Each group is unique and autonomous within the FoE International network. This allows for incredible diversity between groups. The main characteristic that distinguishes FoE from other high profile environmental advocacy organisations is the recognition that environmental sustainability and social justice are fundamentally linked. This is reflected in the campaign priorities of FoE groups throughout the world.

Friends of the Earth Australia officially began in 1973, with a group in Melbourne which identified with the philosophies of FoE in the United States. For many, the establishment of FoE in Australia was important because it offered, and continues to offer, an alternative to the often hierarchical structures of other environment groups by choosing to work on a grass roots activist level. The most recent incarnation of Friends of the Earth Brisbane came out of the Save Stradbroke Island campaign in the 1990s, aiming to fulfil the need for a more coordinated and radical social change movement in Queensland and in Brisbane in particular. Single-issue groups will always have a valid place, there is room for a grassroots organisation which can facilitate a more coordinated approach and provide infrastructure and resources for more efficient campaigning. FoE Brisbane aims to meet this need.

Since it formed 15 years ago, Friends of the Earth Brisbane has initiated two re-use businesses - Reverse Garbage and the Bicycle Revolution, both of which have been established as independent, non-profit, worker-run cooperatives. These types of projects are part of FoE's long term funding strategy as well as our efforts to promote alternatives to an increasingly alienating and environmentally destructive economy.

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Our Vision

Friends of the Earth-Brisbane Co-op Ltd is a community based social change cooperative working on local, regional, national and international issues. We are working towards the creation of an ecologically sustainable and socially just society through community action.

Our philosophies and principles

The philosophies, principles and aims of FoEB are its core and soul. These are often the reasons people join FoEB rather than some other group.

We believe that the roots of environmental destruction and social destruction lie in social structures that are based ultimately on the power of the rich to exploit the poor, a power backed up by violence as the final argument.

The Vision Statement, Principles and Aims and Objectives of FoEB are laid out in the legal Rules of the Co-op. They constitute and summarise the work of FoEB members past and present, and reflect the varying political and social philosophies that these people have brought to FoEB, their aspirations, and to a degree the way that campaigning gets done in FoEB.

Our Principles

1. We recognise the interdependence of all life on earth
2. We uphold the principles of non-violence
3. We acknowledge the rights of all indigenous peoples to self determination
4. We acknowledge and abhor the past and continuing dispossession and marginalisation of the indigenous people of Australia and of other indigenous peoples throughout the world
5. We reject patriarchy and any other form of elitist hierarchy in our society
6. We reject racism, sexism, colonialism and all other such forms of discrimination and oppression
7. We acknowledge, respect and value cultural diversity and different knowledge systems
8. We support the concepts of inter-generational equity and intra-generational equity (supporting the rights of communities to pursue their own development path without compromising the opportunities of other communities or future generations to pursue their own development paths)
9. We do not endorse political parties
10. We aspire to achieve egalitarian participation in work and decision making within the cooperative
11. We work cooperatively using a consensus model as described in these rules
12. We individually and collectively take full responsibility for ourselves and for the consequences of our actions
13. We recognise non-violent direct action as a legitimate tool to achieve our vision
14. We seek to develop a community of activism based on nurturing and respect for members and for the public at large
15. We actively encourage skill sharing
16. As part of our insistence on transparency of process and organisational honesty and integrity, we critically evaluate our processes and activities
17. While acknowledging our agreement to join Friends of the Earth Australia Inc., we remain a self-managed, independent cooperative

Our Aims and Objectives

1. Stimulate a movement of social change towards a socially just and ecologically sustainable society.
2. Halt the destruction of ecosystems and the corresponding loss of biological diversity and ecological processes.
3. Restore and encourage the restoration of degraded ecosystems
4. Encourage the ecologically sustainable and socially just use and distribution of the earth's resources
5. Encourage local community self reliance and autonomy
6. Encourage the development of a well informed and active community
7. Provide the organisational framework and infrastructure to support the social change, community development and ecological restoration/conservation aspirations of members

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We are a Cooperative

FoE is a cooperative, registered under the Qld Cooperatives Act 1997. As a co-operative, members have a direct say over the running of the organisation, and our decisions are made by consensus. We actively maintain a DIY culture. As a cooperative, FoEB is required to have a minimum number of Directors. All directors must be Active Members. Technically the role of the Directors is to make sure that all decisions of FoEB – including Collectives – are in accordance with the Cooperatives Act “and other instruments of law”.

Due to the non-hierarchical structure of FoE, our Directors have been internally labelled **Interested Followers**. As outlined in the FoE ‘Organisational Management Structure’: the Interested Followers have delegated most management duties to the HUB, and the delegation is renewed each year at the AGM.

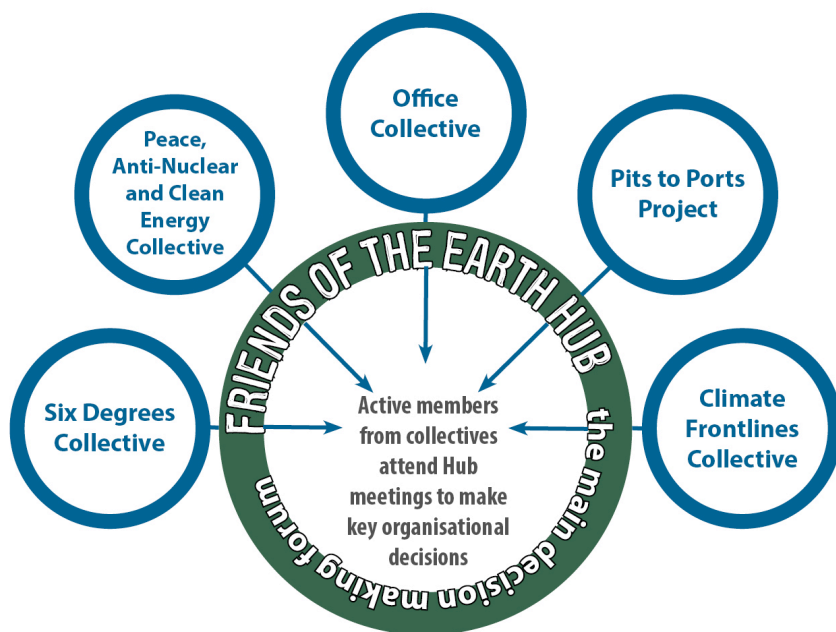
The Hub

The core decision-making body of FoEB is the Hub. Like the hub of a wheel, it “holds together”, or coordinates, the actions of the various spokes. The Hub consists of Active Members, including representatives of at least 75% of FoE collectives. People who are not Active Members may be invited to participate in discussion, but have no decision-making rights. Hub meetings are currently held monthly.

Hub meetings typically include reports from collectives, the raising of policy issues, consideration of proposals for new collectives, consideration of Membership applications, and other business as it arises. Decision-making is by consensus.

Any Active Member is required to participate in a minimum of FOUR Hub meetings per year as not everyone can make every meeting; but it is important that everyone contribute some input in order that the Cooperative not be dominated by particular individuals or tendencies. This is to ensure that it is the people who have demonstrated a commitment to the organisation who make decisions about its direction.

The Hub is generally responsible for the on-going organisational management of the co-op; fundraising, membership, political direction, legal matters, FoE Australia matters, etc. Hub also organises meetings for FoEB as a whole: an Annual General Meeting generally held fairly late in the year, and Special General Meetings.



The Collectives

Collectives are in many ways the active component of FoEB. FoEB was conceived of as an activist organisation working on a number of campaigns simultaneously, each campaign runs through a collective, and changing as interests and people do. It is relatively rare that the Hub will make a decision committing the whole of FoEB to a particular course of action. Collectives consist of a minimum number of 3 Active Members, plus interested people who are not at the time Active Members.

Collectives operate pretty much independently of the Hub – so long as their work is within the scope of the organisational yearly strategic plan. Our current campaign collectives and working groups are:

- **The Office Collective** (Support Collective) is made up of active members and workers from campaign Collectives whose primary role is to oversee the smooth running of the office and various ‘core’ organisational tasks.
- **P.A.C.E Collective** (Peace, Anti-Nuclear, Clean Energy) is working for a more peaceful world beyond the nuclear cycle and the military complex. It is concerned with opposition to food-irradiation: particular focus is on community engagement with the issues of international trade in irradiated food and local labelling laws and stronger regulations; with opposition to US militarisation of our region, particularly the

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Talisman Sabre program biannually in Rockhampton, raising awareness of, and opposition to significant aspects of the Nuclear industry from mining to energy, to waste management; and to exploring sustainable energy alternatives.

- **Six Degrees Collective** (Coal, coal seam gas and climate change collective) works with communities and groups across Queensland to reduce dependence on the coal industry and stop the expansion of the coal seam gas industry.
- **The Climate Frontlines Collective** examines the human rights perspective of what has mostly been a debate focused on carbon emissions. The emissions of the wealthy, industrialised countries are far in excess of poorer countries. The collective works with Pacific Island and Torres Strait Island communities to bring the reality of the frontlines of climate change to Australians.

Consensus : Our Decision-Making Process

All collectives and the Hub of FoEB make decisions via a consensus model. Consensus is the idea that ideally the group is best served if *all* members of a group agree to a given course of action. This is very different to the standard decision-making model used in social organizations where a Chairperson seeks a simple majority based on voting. The consensus model has been adopted by groups that seek to practice a non-hierarchical model of decision-making, whereby solutions are not found by competitively adopting one over the other, but by seeking a course of action that either encapsulates the best of all proposals under consideration. The background idea here is that group process and maintenance is more important than any given decision.

Facilitation: The facilitator's task is to encourage the group to make decisions according to the aims it sets itself. The facilitator puts together an agenda, makes sure everyone has the opportunity to participate and is responsible for guiding the group through discussions and decisions.

Self-facilitation: we encourage meeting participants to take responsibility for the nature of the meeting and not just rely on the facilitator. If something has been said already, don't feel the need to repeat it and be aware of how much you are or are not participating in the meeting.

Straw poll: people indicate whether or not they support a proposal. It's different from a vote as it is used to clarify opinions and leads to further conversation.

Blocking: This is the right of any member to veto a decision. Blocking is a big responsibility: a member who blocks must genuinely think or feel that a given proposal is contrary to the spirit or letter of the Principles; or is detrimental in some other way. It is vital that a person blocking be able to argue their case for blocking the proposal in question.

Grievances

In all personal relationships and social settings it is to be expected that we will have problems or conflicts with each other. FoEB is no different. In working within a volunteer based organisation it is very important that these differences be addressed as soon as possible. To this end, FoEB has a grievance policy – we encourage all volunteers to be familiar with the processes it sets out for dealing with grievances.

Reports

Monthly hub check-in – Each hub meeting includes an opportunity for each of the collectives to provide a report-back on what has been happening in the campaign, what the collective requires from the organisation and what is coming up for each collective. This is the major means of communication between the collectives and FoEB as a whole.

Reports to the AGM – Each collective is required to produce a report for the AGM which details the objectives, achievements and reflections from the previous year. This is a legal requirement, but it also assists in the evaluative process for strategic planning purposes.

Reports to FoE Australia – Collectives are also expected to contribute to the FoE Brisbane Reports to FoE Australia. This is to ensure some degree of consistency between campaigns around the country, and to explore possibilities for building national (and even international) alliances and cross-fertilisations.

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Around the office

It is our aim that the FoE House is a hub of community activity and activism in Brisbane. We also hope that the FoE House is different from other offices in the way that it works and in the way that people work together. We hope to create a very different office culture than those we generally experience.

The FoE Office is available for use by all members and collectives of FoEB. It is important to remember that it is a shared space and we therefore need to be respectful of each other's needs. The FoE Office is a self-managed space – and this means that all people who work in the office should take responsibility for its smooth running. We need to be conscious of our impact on each other – particularly in terms of noise, clutter, use of space and access to equipment. People taking responsibility and initiative is what keeps the FoE Office a smoothly functioning and effectively resourced support for campaigning work.

Meetings!

Hub meetings: are held on the second Wednesday of every month, alternating between 10.30am and 5.30pm.

Annual meetings: As specified in our constitution, we are required to have an annual general meeting each year. At this meeting, we have review and accept the annual report and the auditors report. It is also when we review the current list of active members and Interested Followers.

Special General Meetings: From time to time, FoEB may call a special general meeting to perform a number of specific tasks. For example, a SGM may be required to change rules of the co-op or to elect Interested Followers to fill casual vacancies on the Board.

Strategic planning: At least once a year, FoE Brisbane has a strategic planning meeting. These meetings consist of any active members, and people involved in campaign collectives. Ideally, a first meeting takes place early in the year to formulate the strategic plan, and the second takes place roughly six months later as a review and revision of the strategic plan as required. These are the main meetings of the members to determine the direction of FoE and provide an overall review of the organisation structure; development and processes; and long term plan.

National meetings: There are two meetings each year. A January/February (Summer) meeting that focuses on skillsharing workshops, liaising on national campaigns and other networking and a Spring meeting, generally held over a weekend in late September, early October. All local groups, national campaigns and office bearers are expected to give a written (and preferably also an oral) report to the AGM meeting, and are encouraged to do so for the Summer meeting.

Key Contacts

Office Collective:

Brad, Franklin and Steve are available through the week.

Contact 07 3171 2255 or membership.brisbane@foe.org.au / office.brisbane@foe.org.au

PACE Collective:

Robin Taubenfeld robin.taubenfeld@hotmail.com

Meets Wednesdays between 10.00 am and 4.00 pm.

Six Degrees Collective:

Shani Tager - shani.tager@foe.org.au

Please email for meeting times

Climate Frontline Collective:

Wendy Flannery - wendy.flannery@foe.org.au

Meets regularly, contact for times

Pits to Ports Project:

Karen Allen - karenajallen@hotmail.com