

Our Position Paper on:



## IN A NUTSHELL

Cleaner beaches and drinking water, less air pollution, safer products and protected wildlife are all things we've gained from being part of the European Union (EU). But it hasn't all been positive. For example, the Common Agriculture Policy has proved an environmental disaster. And sadly the EU is increasingly and simplistically obsessed with economic growth and free trade. Even so, exiting the EU would leave the UK's environment in even worse shape. We need to overhaul the EU so that it focuses on improving people's wellbeing and acts as a global champion for the shared environment we all depend upon.

## THE FACTS

- 1 In the 1970s and 1980s, the UK earned the unattractive nickname 'the dirty man of Europe'.** We had the highest acid rain-causing sulphur dioxide emissions in the EU and our seas weren't much more than open sewers as we pumped sewage into them. It was EU rules that drove improvements and made our country healthier.
- 2 EU rules have successfully restricted our use of bee-harming pesticides, despite the UK Government dismissing scientific evidence and taking the side of pesticide companies.** EU safety standards also led the UK Supreme Court to tell our Government to deal with the dangerous levels of air pollution in our country. The UK Government is currently opposed to these improvements.
- 3 The UK Government is actively encouraging EU negotiations to make a trade deal with the USA – the Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership (TTIP).** This deal threatens to undermine environmental laws and gives giant corporations powers to sue our Government for introducing new laws.

## THE PROBLEM

To protect the environment and human health, we need to take action before damage occurs. Yet UK politicians routinely argue against precautionary decision-making – they don't support an EU ban on the pesticides that harm bees and other pollinators responsible for much of our food supply, for example.

Fortunately, the precautionary principle is enshrined in EU treaties. EU-wide laws also prevent countries gaining a competitive advantage in their industries by setting lower environmental standards. If we leave the EU, the impact on our environment will be negative and long term.

But staying in the EU isn't an easy decision. Like the UK Government, the EU increasingly prioritises economic growth over the environment and our wellbeing, letting itself be influenced more and more by big business rather than ordinary people.

The TTIP free trade deal with the USA – pursued by the EU with active support from the UK Government – aims to remove barriers to trade by harmonising environmental, food and consumer standards on both sides of the Atlantic. Yet standards in the USA are far weaker than in the EU. For example, the USA has banned fewer than 20 unsafe chemicals used in cosmetics, whereas the EU has banned more than 1300. And the TTIP deal not only threatens to weaken current safeguards, it's likely to significantly hinder our ability to introduce new tougher laws.

## WHAT WE THINK

For the sake of our environment, we should remain part of the EU.

The strength of the argument to stay, however, is becoming seriously weakened by the EU's dogged prioritising of economic growth, TTIP negotiations, threats to nature laws, and resistance to democratic reform.

The EU needs to rediscover its way and make environmental and human welfare a core purpose if it is to continue to get support from EU citizens.

*Friends of the Earth, campaigning with others and with the support of citizens across the European Union, calls for the EU to:*

### Change priorities

- The EU's priority should be improving people's lives and taking care of the shared environment we depend on, not economic growth.
- The free trade ideology that is currently flourishing in the EU should be done away with and negotiations on the Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership (TTIP) must be abandoned.

### Improve laws

- The EU should not be allowed to weaken laws that protect the environment or public health. Policies like the Common Agricultural Policy and Common Fisheries Policy should be overhauled to put long-term, sustainable protection and management of our environment at their centre.
- Countries should be free to introduce stronger environmental laws that set an example to others in the EU.

### Reinvigorate democracy

- The elected European Parliament should have the power to initiate environmental and health legislation and be given an equal say with national leaders on final decision-making.
- The opinions, discussions and activities of EU members on environmental matters must be published publicly and when corporations, NGOs or others try to lobby and influence decisions, this should be made transparent.
- It should be possible for people and NGOs to challenge EU decisions in EU courts if they do not adhere to EU law.
- EU commissioners wield huge power in the EU, deciding what legislation is introduced or cut. The European Parliament should have the power to reject unsuitable potential commissioners, for example when they have no track record, little interest in or are hostile to environmental protection.
- Commissioners and EU civil servants must spend at least as much time talking to public interest groups (such as charities) as they do to corporations.
- Representatives with corporate interests, or those paid by them, should not form a majority on advisory groups to the EU Commission.



## KEY REFERENCES

Charlotte Burns for Friends of the Earth (2015), The EU Referendum and the environment:

[www.foe.co.uk/sites/default/files/downloads/eu-referendum-environment-81600.pdf](http://www.foe.co.uk/sites/default/files/downloads/eu-referendum-environment-81600.pdf)

European Environment Agency (2013), Late lessons from early warnings: science, precaution and innovation:

[www.eea.europa.eu/publications/late-lessons-2](http://www.eea.europa.eu/publications/late-lessons-2)

## USEFUL LINKS

Friends of the Earth Europe web pages on corporate accountability:

[www.foeeurope.org/corporate-accountability](http://www.foeeurope.org/corporate-accountability)

Friends of the Earth web page on TTIP:

[www.foe.co.uk/page/what-ttip-why-worry-about-it](http://www.foe.co.uk/page/what-ttip-why-worry-about-it)

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