**PEWG position statement April 2024\***

 **Introduction**

The Parliamentary Engagement Working Group (PEWG) is a committee of General Meeting for Scotland which is the organisation of Quakers in Scotland. Together with our Parliamentary Engagement Officer (PEO) we work on behalf of Quakers in Britain to engage with the Scottish Government, the Scottish Parliament and a range of Scottish political and public audiences in order to bring about change. The priorities for the work of the PEWG are discerned by General Meeting for Scotland.

The work of the Parliamentary Engagement Working Group draws upon Quakers’ longstanding and deeply held belief that there is “that of God in everyone”. Our vision is of a peaceful and sustainable future built on just relationships between people and with the earth. The work is our testimony to living out our faith in the world and is rooted in our core values of Peace, Equality, Truth and Integrity, Simplicity and Sustainability

1. **Our aspirations and approach**

Our role is “drawing spirituality out into the political world, to testify to that of God in the community and environment around us” (*A. Mackintosh*).

Our work is spirit- led; we speak out in the world but we also listen to the insights of others; where possible we work with others to help achieve change; we speak truth to power with love and hold those in power in the Light. Change comes through trust between electorate and government and our hope is to build bridges between and among ourselves and those in power. Our elected representatives carry heavy responsibilities and we must thank those who work towards a just, peaceful and sustainable future. We recognise that at times we may fall short of these ideals.

1. **Our priorities:**

We prioritise speaking out on issues where there are clear Quaker positions, where there is opportunity for change and where we can bring new perspectives to the debate. At present our priorities are:

* Climate Justice
* Economic justice
* Peace building

We are also flexible in order to respond to opportunities that may arise

1. **Our Work:**
2. **Climate justice:**

“*We do not own the World and its riches are not ours to dispose of at will” Advices & Queries 42.* We believe we have responsibilities for all that we have been given and all we have taken from Mother Earth. In the face of overwhelming evidence of rapidly increasing destruction of the Earth we are called to work for a World that prioritises ecological repair and wellbeing. We can all make a contribution but without government intervention it will never be enough. While we welcome progress that has been made, including the Climate Change Act 2019, the picture remains challenging, particularly over the next decade.

Guided by our core values we support:

* **Approaches which recognise the deep connection between the Earth**

**and the Spirit by–**opposing frameworks that position land, water and oceans primarily as assets for human exploitation and supporting moves that give a voice and rights to the natural world.

* **Recognition of our moral obligations to the global south by** – championing the rights of those in marginalised countries already affected by climate change ensuring they have a strong voice at COP26 and beyond; paying our fair share towards the global crisis; accepting our moral duty to give sanctuary to refugees escaping from countries suffering the effects of climate change.
* **Solutions which ensure protection of the poor and disadvantaged** **and which offer new opportunities by** - creating training for the jobs required by the transition to zero carbon; prioritising poor housing for retrofitting to ameliorate fuel poverty and ensuring the money to pay for the transition comes from those individuals and companies most able to pay.
* **Honesty and leadership from those in power** **as to the scale of the problem and what is required by** – educating and working with communities and schools, finding networks to reach those who are not yet aware of the challenge; building trust by open and clear communication.
* **A culture of political consensus** **to address a crisis which will take at least 25 years to address by** - building bridges across political divides; urging politicians to agree the direction of travel and listen to each other.
* **Accountability of politicians to the commitments they have made to the citizens of Scotland by** – ensuring that promises and legal obligations to act are followed through, recommendations from reports are fulfilled and consultations are well publicised and responses listened to.
1. **Economic justice:**

*What are the changes which are needed to the systemic injustice and inequality that we see in society?...Quakerism is all about putting our faith in a power which transforms us ... we are called to consider what each of us can do” Minute 36 Britain Yearly Meeting 2015.*

As a result of the Covid-19 pandemic some of the approaches to environmental change have become interlinked with strategies for an economic “green recovery” which could address both deep inequality in society and benefit the environment.

Guided by our values we support government policy which:

* Aims to reduce poverty and marginalisation in society when allocating public funds across the full range of public services.
* Ensures that the cost of public services is paid for by those (both people and organisations) who can most afford it.
* Aims to remove loopholes in law which enable large scale tax avoidance contrary to the spirit of the tax system.
* Brings forward phased removal of financial incentives currently enjoyed by the fossil fuel industry in tandem with plans for the support, re-training and redeployment of the fossil fuel industry workforce.
* Prioritises investment in the transition to zero carbon and ensures that any financial packages are only granted to companies that put people and planet first.
* Creates financial incentives which encourage agro-ecological farming and sustainable land use including peat restoration.
* Brings forward the creation of a land tax and other financial incentives to address the inequality created by land ownership in Scotland and further opens up land to community ownership both rural and urban.
1. **Peace Building:**

*Quaker belief that there is 'that of God in everyone', leads us to renounce violence and to work actively for peace.*

Increasing militarisation is apparent in the promotion of armed forces in our schools, the huge growth of arms contracts with countries overseas, support for military spending to “protect” national interests and in current language used by politicians. While the Scottish government does not have the powers over some of these developments we will:

* Continue to support closer monitoring of military visits to schools and a child’s right not to attend these visits.
* Oppose Scottish government investment in companies producing military equipment.
* Oppose the sale of arms particularly to countries where it has been established that weapons are used in contravention of international law and violate human rights.
* Support an increase in peace building education and activities in schools.
1. **Other opportunities**

Where opportunities arise in Scotland which speak to our Quaker beliefs and values we will work to influence government policy to bring about change.

*\*This position paper was inherited by the Convenors from their predecessor in Nov 2021 and the only update in April 2024 has been to bring the priority area titles in line with the decisions made at GM in November 2022*