

# Friends of Soqotra 2023 Executive Committee and Annual General Meetings Minutes

These minutes include the meeting notes of the Executive Committee Meeting (June 2023) and the Annual General Meeting (September 2023) of the Friends of Soqotra.

## 1. Dates and participants

### 1.1 Attendees (and Apologies) Executive Committee Meeting – June 2023

**Name of Association:** Friends of Soqotra (UK Charity Number 1097546)

**Type of Meeting:** Executive Committee Meeting (half-year meeting of the Committee).

**Date and Time of Meeting:** 22<sup>nd</sup> June 2023, 10:00 – 11:00 UK time

**Venue:** online.

FoS members (Executive Committee Members indicated with \*) present: Kay Van Damme\* (KVD), Petr Maděra\* (PM), Hana Habrová\* (HH), Miranda Morris\* (MM), Francesca Pella\* (FP), Fabio Attorre\* (FA), Vladimir Melnik\* (VM), Eike Neubert\* (EN), Tullia Riccardi\* (TR), Dana Pietsch\* (DP).

Apologies were received by Haifaa Abdulhalim\* (HA) and Rowan Salim\* (RS).

The agenda is attached as Appendix 1.

### 1.2 Attendants and Apologies – September 2023.

**Name of Association:** Friends of Soqotra (UK Charity Number 1097546)

**Type of Meeting:** Executive Committee Meeting (AGM; annual meeting open to all members).

**Date and Time of Meeting:** 17<sup>th</sup> September 2023, 9:00 – 12:30 UK time

**Venue:** online and in presence (Poznan, Poland).

Attendants included FoS members (including committee members), of which the majority joined through the online meeting platform Zoom, others were present in person at the venue.

FoS members Executive Committee Members indicated with \*) present: Raquel Vasconcelos\* (RV), Kay Van Damme\* (KVD), Haifaa Abdulhalim\* (HA), Petr Maděra\* (PM), Hana Habrová\* (HH), Miranda Morris\* (MM), Francesca Pella\* (FP), Fabio Attorre\* (FA), Rowan Salim\* (RS), Vladimir Melnik\* (VM), Eike Neubert\* (EN), Dana Pietsch\* (DP), Dario La Montagna (DLM), Alaa Owaineh\* (AO), Christina Deborah Herzel Matsumura, Salem Hamdiah, Jana Tulková, Natálie Holešová, Conrad Celinski and others, including non-members.

The agenda is attached as Appendix 2.

## 2. Minutes

The AGM was opened by the Chair (KVD).

## **2.1 Communications and Outreach**

### **2.1.1 Tayf**

KVD communicated that the Tayf editor, HH, reported that Tayf Issue 19 (2022) was completed; several copies of Tayf 18 and 19 were printed (and co-funded) by Mendel University (Brno) and distributed in Socotra in person in April 2023. Copies were also brought to Poznan at the AGM, for the attendants. The status of other issues was discussed, as well as the planning for printing and translation (Table below; A = Arabic; E = English; Q1-4 = first to fourth quarter). The Tayf editor called for new articles for the next volume (2023), and HA confirmed the commitment in Arabic translation of the Tayf issues.

<b>Tayf (issue)</b>	<b>English (layout)</b>	<b>Arabic (layout)</b>	<b>Online</b>	<b>Print (Soqotra)</b>
2020 (17)	OK	OK	OK	OK
2021 (18)	OK	Q3 2023	E OK A Q4 2023	E OK A Q4 2023
2022 (19)	OK	Q4 2023	E+A Q4 2023	E+A Q4 2023
2023 (20)	Q4 2023	Q4 2023	E+A Q4 2023	E+A Q2 2024
2024 (21)	Q2 2024	Q4 2024	E+A Q4 2024	Q4 2024

### **2.1.2 Website**

A re-design of the website was discussed, depending on costs and feasibility. The website design and potential transfer to another hosting service will be discussed further once the new treasurer is active, in order to be able to cover potential costs. New publications are announced online, and the website is maintained as before.

### **2.1.3 Social Media**

By the AGM of 2023, the FoS Facebook page counted 1522 followers. On average, there is one post per every two weeks, with good engagement. Based on the FB metrics, the page is in “good health” and the correlation between performance and positive reactions is “excellent”. The largest national group of FoS FB followers is from Yemen (32%).

The Instagram account, created in 2023 and maintained by DLM, counted 55 followers and 78 are following (by Sept 2023). It was agreed to continue with the Instagram profile, as most tourists use Instagram, not Facebook, in order to have awareness impacts.

### **2.1.4 Flyers and Leaflets**

The last leaflets created by FoS dated to 2020 (freshwater flyer), and the general leaflet for the association is outdated. A new leaflet of the association was designed in English by a new FoS member who is also a professional graphic designer, including FoS brand guidelines for future graphic designs with renovated

style and colour palette options. New potential leaflets on diverse topics were discussed, such as the proposal of a general leaflet on water.

### **2.1.5 Archive**

The archive was updated with the list of publications for 2022, which were extrapolated from Web of Science, using keywords related to the Socotra Archipelago. These were posted on the website and the overview will be discussed in Tayf 20 (2023), as every year.

### **2.1.6 Last AGM**

The AGM of 2022 in Rome was a great success, also attended by Socotran researchers and representatives of the Yemen Embassy in Rome in person. The Committee formally thanked the organisers of La Sapienza/Botanical Garden of Rome, in particular Fabio Attorre, Dario La Montagna, Tullia Riccardi and Michele De Sanctis for their efforts and a successful meeting.

### **2.1.7 Other**

Media coverage of FoS in 2023 was positive. FoS was mentioned in an article on invasive species threats in Socotra by UNESCO, and an article about the Socotran Dragon's Blood Tree (by Annabel Hesselstine; *Resurgence and Ecologist*).

## **3.1 Core**

### **3.1.1 Finances**

The FoS bank account balance is 6,467.39€ (*as of June 2023*). The PayPal balance is 972.24€, from September 2022 to June 2023 FoS recorded 24 PayPal payments, plus donations.

### **3.1.2 Governance**

In June 2023 the FoS Committee voted Dario La Montagna (DLM), PhD student La Sapienza (Rome), working as a botanist on Socotran *Commiphora*, as a new Committee Member; Tullia Riccardi (TR) resigned from the Committee yet remains a FoS member. Alaa Owaineh (AO), resident in the UK, was introduced to the committee and proposed as the FoS new Treasurer. The committee unanimously voted AO as new Trustee and Committee Member of FoS, taking on the voluntary role of Treasurer. Transfer of tasks would be facilitated by the Chair, Secretary and help from the last Treasurer. Miranda Morris requested to step down in her role as Trustee of FoS (*as of June 2023*), and this information would be immediately updated on the Charity Commission Website (KVD).

### **3.1.3 Membership**

In total, 122 contacts are present in our current email-database (organised through the software "MailChimp"). The number of paid members were 45 in 2022, and since the beginning of 2023 there were seven new members (52 paying members in total). FP suggested to the members of the Committee if they could check their own status and payments of the membership fees. Membership payments and updates would be further revised in 2024 once the new treasurer would become active.

### **3.1.4 Committee**

At the AGM in September 2023, the Committee voted (majority of votes, by raise of hands) for the members in voluntary Trustee roles of Chair (KVD), Secretary (FP) and Treasurer (AO). The rest of the Committee volunteered and were agreed to continue with tasks as before (e.g., Tayf Editor HH, Website DP, etc.); as stated earlier, TR resigned and DLM joined as new committee member.

The new composition of the Committee was agreed. The Committee requested to have a follow-up meeting after the AGM to interact and discuss ideas. This suggestion was accepted and adopted, and an informal (online) follow-up executive committee meeting would be organised. DP reiterated the importance of meeting in person as well, other Committee members pointed out that travel is not convenient for all (hence meetings are mixed virtual and in person).

## **4.1 Projects, Grants and Science**

### **4.1.1 Mangroves**

Like every year since the beginning of the Mangrove project, the Ghubbah Mangrove Restoration site was visited (in Spring 2023) by FoS. These field visits happen usually twice per year, as well as regular communication with the Al Tamek Association of Ghubbah, through WhatsApp. In spring 2023, the FoS Chair visited the site (with PM and DLM) and observed that the mangrove trees looked strong and healthy, growing, and new individuals were recorded. HA followed up on awareness activities at the end of 2022 (after the Rome AGM).

### **4.1.2 Indigenous Culture and Language**

FoS Chair (KVD) gave a presentation during an online activity organized by Yemen-based awareness organisation Green Voices, speaking jointly about the importance of nature-culture connections in Socotra with Ahmed Al-Rumaily of the Soqotra Foundation for Cultural Heritage (Monday June 5<sup>th</sup> 2023). MM prepared an article for Tayf 19 including general updates about Soqotri culture and language. MM proposed to donate her book (Miranda Morris and Tānuf Sālim Di-Kišin 2021, *The Oral Art of Soqotra: A Collection of Island Voices*) to Socotra.

During the September AGM, it was discussed that a copy (consisting of 3 volumes) would be sent to the Chair (KVD), to be brought to Socotra.

### **4.1.3 Other FoS projects**

On the 2<sup>nd</sup> of February, 2023, *World Wetlands Day* was celebrated on the island, with RAMSAR, EPA, IUCN and Socotri NGOs, including input from FoS. The activities included presentations and drawing competitions in schools, and the installation of two signs close to Sirihin and Detwah lagoons respectively, which also include the FoS logo.

FoS received offers of donations in 2023, without a specification of the amount offered. The offer was received by the Secretary and forwarded to the Committee for discussion. The Committee discussed that a suggestion of a donor could be followed if realistic and agreed by the Committee (and as was done in

the past, for example with a donation in the past for kareef/house reparation in Homhil, following the cyclones); or/and implemented through Socotran NGOs asking about their priorities. FoS can also facilitate such offers by printing awareness materials and bringing them directly to Socotra. RV suggested that all printed materials should be ecologically friendly (and potentially, not plastic-based), MM recommended that it would be important to use high quality material. FP suggested to contact the members to request their opinions and proposals regarding activities and donations.

#### **4.1.4 Education and awareness**

An awareness event was organised in Froxfield School (Hampshire, UK) Friday 27<sup>th</sup> of January (2023) by FP. Other education and awareness activities were discussed under previous agenda points, including Tayf awareness importance, the annual conference/AGM, social media and activities on the ground (e.g., World Wetlands Day). KVD emphasized to the committee that FoS continues to reach hundreds of people per year, online (social media) and in person, and that these efforts in environmental/cultural awareness should continue.

#### **5.1 Any Other Business**

A fundraising event was organised by FP on behalf of FoS with Froxfield School in the UK (Year 3) on the 6<sup>th</sup> and 7<sup>th</sup> of June, 2023. The pupils raised 120£. Three proposals were made to spend the amount: (1) making local handcrafts in Socotra (similar to those at the event, small bracelets); (2) exchanging letters between schools in Socotra and that of Froxfield; (3) preparing awareness material for marine turtles and sending this to the island to support the Socotra Turtles' Association. The activity and use of the donation would be further discussed in 2023 (with the plan to implement it).

Selborne Gilbert White house in Selborne (UK) invited FP as FoS Secretary to speak about Socotra and FoS. The date is pending. Different local institutions already showed interest to be kept informed.

KVD mentioned relevant and widespread impacts on the island: coral stone collection has raised significantly, and EPA and local communities expressed strong concerns. Poaching of sea turtles is a recurrent issue as well, observed again in 2023 in the field (KVD mentions a new initiative with an Oman institution to tackle the impacts on the animals and to increase awareness together with local communities). In addition, impacts of unmanaged tourism are quite strong, and awareness materials targeting tourists are crucial. VM mentioned that during his individual last travel to Socotra in 2023, he observed an increase in number of tourists and cars, in particular in the most vulnerable areas, such as Detwah and Erher. He detected conflicts and discontent between tourism business and local communities; his suggestion to mitigate the impacts of tourism activities included applying fines. Moreover, it was mentioned by KVD and VM that some facilities have been built in sensitive sites without planning (uncalculated impacts and damage).

Two new articles are in preparation with contributions of FoS (and presented at the AGMs) and with active and fruitful contributions of Socotri researchers: a) climate impacts of *Dracaena cinnabari* in Firmihin, by Vahalík et al. , where FoS was mentioned in the acknowledgements; b) Future distribution under different climate models of the endemic *Commiphora* spp. in Socotra by La Montagna et al. , which was presented at the FoS conference in Rome in 2022.

A suggestion of creating FoS reusable (cloth) bags was advanced, with the target of contributing towards the reduction of using plastic in Socotra.

MM offered to fund the production of FoS leaflets, either on the topics of waste or water. She suggested that pictures would be selected of the same area, in one of which the spot looks clean and in the other is affected by the presence of litter; the aim is to discourage the dumping of waste and to recommend keeping all the places clean.

KVD is available to help make and print the leaflets and to bring them to Socotra (estimated quotation for about 100\$). The digital version would also be distributed online.

### 5.1.1 Venue for 2024 FoS Conference and AGM

The venue and dates for the next FoS Conference will be decided and communicated by April-May 2024 after the next half-yearly Committee meeting.

## Appendix 1

### Agenda

#### 1 - Objectives

The subcommittees are sharing the information about news and activities that they are carrying out since the last AGM (September 2022), highlighting the development of the planned engagements for this year, such as the Friends of Socotra (FoS) Conference and AGM.

#### 2 – Timetable

<b>Type of session</b>	Plenary, online
<b>Session focus</b>	Meeting of the FoS Committee Members & Summary of the activities of the Charity FoS
<b>Duration</b>	One Hour
<b>Meeting Chair</b>	The meeting is chaired by the Chairperson, minutes/notes by Secretary
<b>Online meeting link</b>	Zoom link will be sent to the participants. The meeting could be recorded.
<b>Time (BST)</b>	<b>Subject</b>
10:00-10:05	<b>Welcome Remarks + Apologies</b>
10:05-10:20	<b>Communication and Outreach</b> <b>Tayf</b> (FoS Newsletter). Lead: Hana Habrová. Other: Haifaa Abdulhalim, Kay Van Damme <b>Website</b> . Lead: Dana Pietsch. Other: Luca Malatesta, Tullia Riccardi, Kay Van Damme <b>Media &amp; Social Media</b> . Lead: Kay Van Damme. Other: Tullia Riccardi <b>Archive (Photo/Bibliography)</b> . Lead: Martin Rezbek. Other: Petr Madera, Vladimir Melnik, Dirk van Dorpe
10:20-10:30	<b>Finances, Budgeting and Fundraising/Donations</b> <b>General Finance</b> . Lead: F. Pella <i>ad interim</i> . Other: Haifaa Abdulhalim <b>Governance/Policies (incl. Privacy) and Regulations/Ethics</b> <b>General Governance</b> . Lead: Kay Van Damme. Other: Francesca Pella, Fabio Attorre, Raquel Vasconcelos <b>Membership (Engagement, Updates, Membership Admin)</b> <b>Membership</b> . Lead: Francesca Pella. Other: Haifaa Abdulhalim, Mark Thomlinson, Kay Van Damme
10:30-10:40	<b>Projects, Grants and Scientific Research</b> <b>Mangrove Project</b> . Lead: Haifaa Abdulhalim. Other: Samuel Lvoncik, Fabio Attorre, Petr Madera, Kay Van Damme, Martin Rezbek. <b>Indigenous Culture &amp; Language</b> . Lead: Miranda Morris. Other: Haifaa Abdulhalim <b>Grants</b> . Lead: Francesca Pella. Other: Eike Neubert, Kay Van Damme, Haifaa Abdulhalim

	<b>Other Projects &amp; Links (nature).</b> Lead: Kay Van Damme. Other: Francesca Pella, Haifaa Abdulhalim, Eike Neubert.
<b>10:40-10:50</b>	<b>Conferences/Meetings/AGM Meetings and Events.</b> Lead: Kay Van Damme. Other: Francesca Pella, Fabio Attorre, Petr Madera, Tullia Riccardi, Luca Malatesta. <b>Education/Awareness materials.</b> Activity on Socotra (Tayf)
<b>10:50-11:00</b>	<b>Any other business</b> <b>Closure of meeting</b>

## Appendix 2

### 22<sup>nd</sup> International Socotra Conference and Annual General Meeting of the Friends of Socotra (FoS)

AGM 17<sup>th</sup> September 2023, Adam Mickiewicz University, Poznań, Poland

9.00 - 10.30 AGM – FoS Committee Activity and Financial Reports

10.30 -11.00 Coffee Break

11.00 - 12.30 AGM – FoS Committee Activity + Future Projects

1. **Opening**
2. **Apologies/Present**
3. **Committee Election**
4. **2022 AGM minutes**
5. **FoS 2023 Trustees Annual Report**

Chairperson's Report (KVD)

FoS Subcommittees' Report – on FoS Activities **only** (KVD & Francesca Pella)

- i. Communications and Outreach
  - Tayf (Hana Habrova)
  - Website (Dana Pietsch & Luca Malatesta)
  - Media and Social Media (KVD)
  - Archive (Martin Rezbek)
- ii. Finances, Budgeting and Fundraising/Donations (Francesca Pella)
- iii. Membership (Francesca Pella)
- iv. Governance (KVD)
- v. Projects, Grants and Science
  - Mangrove Project (Haifaa Abdulhalim)
  - Indigenous Culture & Language (Miranda Morris)
  - Grants (Francesca Pella)
  - Meetings (KVD)
  - Other FoS Projects/Links nature (KVD)
- vi. Education and Awareness

Other

6. **FoS Strategies and Priorities for 2022-2023**
  - a. Finances
  - b. Membership
  - c. Publications
  - d. Priority Activities (for each subcommittee)
  - e. New Projects/Suggestions/Synergies

- f. Timeline
  - g. Other
- 7. Next Meeting**
  - a. Virtual Committee Meeting 2023 Dates
  - b. Venue 2023
- 8. Any Other Matter**