Friends of Soqotra 2020 Annual General Meeting Minutes

Name of Association: Friends of Soqotra (UK Charity Number 1097546)
Type of Meeting: Annual General Meeting (General Assembly)
Date and Time of Meeting: Saturday September 26th, 2020, 9am-1pm
Venue: Mendel University, Brno, Czech Republic

1. Attendants and Apologies
The AGM was opened by the Chair. Attendants included FoS committee members and regular members, of which several joined through the online meeting platform (Zoom). Due to the Covid-19 pandemic, it was decided by the committee (during the virtual AGM in March 2020) to organise a combined meeting including attendants in real and attendants via an online platform. FoS members present included Raquel Vasconcelos (RV), Vladimir Melnik (VM), Kay Van Damme (KVD), Haifaa Abdulhalim (HA), Petr Maděra (PM), Hana Habrová (HH), Martin Rejzek (MR), Eike Neubert (EN), Tullia Riccardi (TR), Hugh Morris (HM), Miranda Morris (MM), Lisa Banfield (LB), Francesca Pella (FP), Mark Thomlinson (MT), Fabio Attorre (FA), Dana Pietsch (DP), Petr Vahalík, Melissa Stanton, Luca Malatesta, Mauro Fasola, Nathalie Peutz, Mark Stanley Price, Christina Deborah Herzel Matsumura, Salem Hamdiah and others, including non-members (Štěpán Vahalík and Samuel Lvoncik). In total, 14 out of 19 FoS committee members that were elected at the Palermo meeting in 2019, were present at the AGM in Brno. Absence apologies were received by Peter De Geest, Dirk van Dorpe, Sue Christie, Richard Porter, Sabina Knees.

2. Committee Election
Voting was done as per Association’s governing document, including all present (count of hands of those members present in the room in real in addition to those present voting via Zoom (hand raise by camera or using the hand symbol in Zoom). The Executive Committee was elected (proposed, seconded and accepted by majority vote) as follows and includes the following volunteers: Raquel Vasconcelos (Portugal), Fabio Attorre (Italy), Rowan Salim (UK), Francesca Pella (UK), Mark Thomlinson (UK), Kay Van Damme (Belgium), Haifaa Abdulhalim (Jordan), Petr Madera (Czech Republic), Eike Neubert (Germany), Dana Pietsch (Germany), Vladimir Melnik (Russia), Tullia Riccardi (Italy), Hana Habrová (Czech Republic), Martin Rejzek (Czech Republic), Miranda Morris (UK). The Executive Committee members with additional voluntary tasks elected (proposed, seconded and elected through majority vote) as Honorary Officers: Kay Van Damme (Chair), Haifaa Abdulhalim (Vice-Chair), Francesca Pella (Secretary), Mark Thomlinson (Treasurer). The new Honorary Officers introduced themselves during the meeting to elaborate on background and added benefits. Following the hand-over process, administration is transferred to the new Honorary Officers; the Association will be assigned a new contact address (i.e., Secretary Address) once the AGM minutes are distributed and edited by the newly elected committee.
3. 2019 AGM minutes
The minutes of 2019 (available online) were shared to those online through Zoom and passed around in hard copy to attendants in person and approved (/adopted), without any matters arising.

4. Annual Report
The Annual Report was presented by the Chair, including an overview of activities (awareness activities and publications) carried out by FoS since the AGM in Palermo Sep 2019. All activities were compared to the eight objects of FoS as per the Association’s governing document. The activities were presented to all attending and discussed in detail. Inputs were provided by Committee Members responsible for specific activities or outputs, or on behalf of absent members.

**Awareness Campaign Connect2socotra + attendance EU event (UNESCO-FoS)**

The activities highlighted included the UNESCO-FoS Connect2socotra awareness event, engaging 12 organisations (musea, botanical gardens, universities) which organised a range of activities mainly focusing on Soqotra biodiversity and its challenges. A more detailed overview of the campaign was presented on the 26th of September at the FoS conference by UNESCO GCC & Yemen. In total, UNESCO estimated that the activities engaged over 40,000 individuals in person and a much higher number through social media. The impact was monitored in detail by Bruno Bertelli as the topic of an MSc thesis. Several scientific papers were also dedicated to the campaign.

**Local Projects**

- **Mangroves** - Local project updates were provided regarding the Ghubbah Mangrove Replantation Plot on Soqotra Island. FoS received news and photographs in 2020 by ARC-WH and Al Tamek Association, reporting a successful growth of 80 mangrove trees.

- **Proposal Templates – upon agreement of the FoS Committee in 2019**, FoS prepared and launched a very small grant programme (500 USD per project) through a proposal template in Arabic and English for local activities proposed by Soqotri CBOs, NGOs or individuals, available online.

**Website and Social Media**

- **Website** - The website included updates on news regularly in 2020 and all financial reports are made available online. A newly elected website team under Dana Pietsch (see sub-committees in Appendix 1) will coordinate the FoS website contents and provide updates where needed.

- **Social Media** - The FoS fb page has 1.2K likes, about the same number of followers, and until the AGM, it had ca. 80 posts (more than 6 per month) related to biodiversity. Average post
reach is 216. The majority of people reached are Arabic speakers of 26-35yrs old based in Yemen mainland and Soqotra Archipelago.

**FoS Publications and Awareness Materials**

**Tayf** – Tayf 16 (2019) was finished with delay after the AGM in 2019, distributed via electronic copies but was not printed. Tayf 17 (2020) was finalised before the 2020 AGM. Tayf 17 has a new layout, articles and special drawings (geckoes) for the kids’ section made by volunteers, compiled under the lead by Tayf editor H. Habrová. The Arabic translation and layout were done by H. Abdulhalim. Printed copies of Tayf 17 were donated by Mendel University and distributed at the AGM. 20 printed copies were sent with people traveling to Soqotra directly after the meeting to arrive before the end of October, and more (in Arabic) will be printed for distribution on the island – the latter is vital if children are to enjoy this section in Tayf. As every year, Tayf will become available online after the AGM. It was also said that printed copies of Tayf are important to allow for authors to cite their work.

**Awareness Materials** - FoS produced two new leaflets in 2020 in English and Arabic, both available on the website. These include a new leaflet on Freshwater biodiversity of Soqotra by KVD and one on Terrestrial molluscs by Eike Neubert and Estée Bochud (*Naturhistorisches Museum Bern*). The links to the leaflets were shared through social media (fb). FoS also helped (voluntary contribution) to produce a Covid-19 awareness video (published on YouTube) at request of local health teams (led by the Soqotran focal point of the World Health Organisation). The activity which was funded by UNESCO-EU, while FoS contribution was entirely voluntary. The leaflets and videos were distributed to Soqotri Whatsapp groups and distributed further from there. These were confirmed to have arrived on Soqotra instantly (confirmation by the focal point of WHO and other colleagues).

**Scientific Publications and Reports** - The Palermo AGM of 2019 led in August of 2020 to a special issue of the peer-reviewed journal *Rendiconti Lincei* (Springer Nature). Each article contains a dedication to the synergies created by FoS and the special issue is named “Soqotra Biodiversity Research and Nature Conservation”. The special issue includes 14 papers, of which one third by Soqotri co-authors, edited by Fabio Attorre and Kay Van Damme to stimulate terrestrial conservation research on Soqotra. In addition, as in the previous year, a brief report on the 2019 AGM in Palermo, was published in 2020 the journal *Jemen-Report* by the German-Yemeni Society.

5. **Financial Report, Membership and Signatories**

**FoS Accounts and Treasurer’s Financial Report** - The annual financial report was shared through email by Sabina Knees with the Committee a few days before the AGM, read and supported by Hugh Morris in the absence of Sabina Knees for medical reasons. The report covers the period 1.1.2019-31.12.2019. The end of year balance for 2019 in the account was £4,563 (rounded) and at the time of the AGM (September 2020) the total sum in the FoS accounts
amounts to approximately £5,300 (ca. 6,850 USD). For details, see Appendix 2. HM expresses thanks to HA for translating Tayf on a voluntary basis, which has cut down costs for the newsletter entirely.

**Membership** - Membership updates were provided by HA and the importance of engaging new members was discussed as a priority for next year. Towards the AGM, a number of new members joined and old members rejoined. Membership engagement is key to the well-being of FoS and should be prioritised as an activity (members should get something for their membership fee). Potentially, members could have a registration access to materials on the website, or other benefits (FP mentioned pins, something tangible). Membership “package” to be improved this year.

**Signatories and Account** - Three FoS members (Dr Sue Christie, Dr Hugh Morris and Dr Sabina Knees) resigned as signatories for the Association’s bank accounts (Royal Bank of Scotland/RBS, UK). Mark Thomlinson and Francesca Pella were elected by majority as new signatories of the accounts. The three aforementioned resigning Trustees have agreed to remain signatories for the accounts until the newly elected signatories have completed the necessary administrative steps at RBS. The branch is to be changed from Scotland to England and Wales (will be checked by MT). When the new signatories are active, the resigning signatories will be informed by the Committee and step down. As stated in the constitution of FoS, any transaction proposed by the Committee is to be approved by at least two signatories. Information on the accounts and procedure of transfer of signatories at RBS has been shared with the Committee by Hugh Morris. The new Treasurer will follow up on the admin steps to change the branch.

6. **Standing Committees/Subcommittees and Projects**

**Subcommittees** - The Chair proposed to form standing committees/sub-committees in FoS to facilitate task divisions. In total 13 subcommittees (SC) were proposed. Committee Members present at the AGM agreed to be part of one of the committees as outlined below. Each of the subcommittees must contain at least one Honorary Officer as per the Association’s governing document, and each of the Committee Members are part of at least one subcommittee. The names of the subcommittees and the Committee Members who volunteered to join are listed in Appendix 1.

**Projects next working year** - Two new proposals were received from Soqotra in 2020 for local projects, in addition to the committee approving the continuation of earlier/ongoing projects.

1. Repairs to the wall of the Dragon’s Blood Tree nursery in Shibehon/Diksam (in English), submitted by Ann Skinner. The project, in coordination with the Keybani
family, was partly supported by the Franklinia Project as the budget was too high for the small grant scheme by FoS.

2. Support 40-60 home-gardens in the Ma’nefo area (just E of Hadiboh) (received in Arabic, translated by HA) by a local NGO, the Al Khair Association. The project has a range of activities and is in coordination with (and approved by) EPA Soqotra Branch. The activity was granted (500 USD). The activity is aimed at those families with limited access. MM raises the point that Ma’nefo area has been cornering the tomato market on the island, however the local NGO (Al Khair Association) has done the effort to apply and therefore it may stimulate the local use of these proposals. The activity would be combined with environmental awareness activities conducted by EPA.

3. In addition, FoS will continue with Projects approved earlier in 2020, such as the Mangrove Project in Ghubbah and the Soqotri awareness videos in collaboration and in continuation of the Covid-19 video. The latter will be led by KVD.

4. Venue 2021
Two options were proposed, Ghent University, Belgium and La Sapienza University of Rome, Italy. KVD and FA made a commitment to check feasibility and dates for September 2021. Rome was voted as the primary venue however Ghent is be confirmed as alternative (check). Provisional dates are 24-26 September 2021. The 20th AGM will be organised jointly with the second meeting of the Dragon Tree Consortium (PM).

5. Any Other Business
The following letters from Yemen Government, Soqotri NGOs and Soqotri Individuals were received by the Committee to be presented at the AGM:
- A letter of support by the Yemeni Government represented by EPA Yemen (present at the AGM online through Zoom) thanking FoS efforts and organising the meeting.
- Soqotri NGO, the Soqotra Wildlife Association to thank FoS for its efforts.
- Salem Keybani (Diksam/Shibehon) thanking for the networking support to help the Dragon’s Blood Tree Nursery.

Voting – HH proposed to use Doodle in order to reduce the amount of emails to the committee.

The Committee thanks the hosts of the AGM 2020 (Mendel University) for organising a successful conference and AGM with high technical support, during the challenging period of the Covid-19 pandemic.
Suggestion to improve governance (including updating the constitution) and privacy policies during the next year in line with the general laws and regulations regarding charities, and to update the Trustees in correspondence to the actual Committee (KVD). The following Trustees have resigned in 2020: Hugh Morris, Lisa Marie Banfield, Sue Christie, Tony Miller, Sabina Knees. The trustees will be updated with the Charity Commission after the AGM, including the four Honorary Officers and additional Committee Members.

Suggestion to improve fundraising (Mark Stanley Price), while remaining within the capacities of activities that volunteers in FoS can do within the allocated time (Eike Neubert).

6. Activities and Priorities

Several points have been mentioned as key activities for the coming year, including Membership engagement (new members), FoS Policy, Website updates, engagement with indigenous communities through our ongoing projects, Awareness Materials and further Synergies with other projects and groups working on Soqotra. A table with key activities for the next working year and proposed target dates are included in Appendix 3.

7. Note

As each year, the minutes of the meeting are shared with the newly elected Committee before sharing online.
Appendix 1. Subcommittees FoS

**Communication and Outreach**

**SC 1. Tayf (FoS Newsletter).** Lead: Hana Habrová. Other: Haifaa Abdulhalim, Kay Van Damme  
**SC 2. Website.** Lead: Dana Pietsch. Other: Luca Malatesta, Tullia Riccardi, Kay Van Damme  
**SC 3. Media & Social Media.** Lead: Kay Van Damme. Other: Tullia Riccardi  
**SC 4. Archive (Photo/Bibliography).** Lead: Martin Rezjek. Other: Petr Madera, Vladimir Melnik, Dirk van Dorpe

**Finances, Budgeting and Fundraising/Donations**

**SC 5. General Finance.** Lead: Mark Thomlinson. Other: Francesca Pella, Haifaa Abdulhalim

**Governance/Policies (incl. Privacy) and Regulations/Ethics**

**SC 6. General Governance.** Lead: Kay Van Damme. Other: Francesca Pella, Mark Stanley Price, Fabio Attorre, Raquel Vasconcelos

**Projects, Grants and Scientific Research**

**SC 8. Indigenous Culture & Language.** Lead: Miranda Morris. Other: Haifaa Abdulhalim  

**Conferences/Meetings/AGM**

**SC 11. Meetings and Events.** Lead: Kay Van Damme. Other: Francesca Pella, Fabio Attorre, Petr Madera, Tullia Riccardi, Luca Malatesta.

**Membership (Engagement, Updates, Membership Admin)**

**SC 12. Membership.** Lead: Francesca Pella. Other: Haifaa Abdulhalim, Mark Thomlinson, Kay Van Damme

**Education and Awareness (Engagement Local Communities)**

**SC 13. Education/Awareness materials.** Lead: Rowan Salim. Other: Samuel Lvoncik, Kay Van Damme, Haifaa Abdulhalim
Appendix 2. Financial Report

FRIENDS OF SOQOTRA UK CHARITY NUMBER 1097546
FINANCIAL REPORT
AGM 2020

Accompanying the Accounts for 01/01/2019 – 31/12/2019

The accounts for 2019 are in the same format as previous years (with notes relating to individual items). Figures below in () are those for 2018.

**Income:** In 2019 subscriptions fell by £760.89 from £1702.98 to £942.09. Other income during the year comprised £285.15 in donations and £2.59 in interest giving a total income of **£1,229.83**.

**Expenditure:** In 2019 three projects funded including the Fact Sheets on culture and natural history for distribution on Soqotra (£377.00); the Mangrove Project (£656.89) and the Noged Project (£306.45). All these figures included the cost of currency exchange.

The Website Domain is not an annual expenditure but payment of £470.32 was made to Dr Dana Pietsch, Website Manager in August 2019 to cover the cost of hosting the site in 2018.

The principal costs are for the annual production of *Tayf*. The cost of printing and distribution of *Tayf 14* (£432.79) was also reimbursed in 2019 and therefore does not appear in the accounts for 2018.

The total costs for translation of *Tayf 14 and 15* were paid in 2019 the final costs for printing additional copies of *Tayf 15* are still to be confirmed. However, only 200 were printed for the AGM in Bahrain 2018 comprising 100 copies each in Arabic and English. The costs for printing these 200 copies was £787.60. At this point we still have to decide if more are to be printed to send to members. We also need to fulfil our annual British Library obligations of six copies each of English and Arabic.

The insurance premium for 2018-2019 (£254.60) was paid in 2018 but not reimbursed until 2019 along with the insurance for 2019, totaling £529.20.

The Auditor has been paid £50.00 for auditing the 2018 accounts and the 2019 accounts but this will not appear on the accounts until 2021.

£9.00 admin costs were paid in 2019.

The end of year balance in the account was **£4562.53**. At the time of this AGM (in September 2020) the total sum in the FoS accounts amounts to approximately **£5300.00**.

Dr Sabina Knees
Treasurer, Friends of Soqotra
20th September 2020
Notes accompanying the accounts for the year 2019

(A) The income from subscriptions during 2019 was £942.09 which is £760.89 less than 2018.

(B) However, donations for this year were £216.98 more than in 2018 and stand at £285.15.

(C) Projects funded during 2019 included: the printing of Fact Sheets on culture and natural history for distribution on Soqotra (£377.00), the Mangrove Project (£656.89) and the Noged Project (£306.45). In each case the additional cost of transferring monies into different currencies is included in the final figure.

(D) The Website Domain and development costs (£470.32) are not an annual expenditure so did not appear in the accounts for 2018 but were paid in 2019. This figure takes account of the cost of transferring monies from a UK Sterling account (£20.00.) to a Euro account of the website manager (D Pietsch) in Germany.

(E) The total costs for translation of Tayf 14 (£774.51) and 15 (£831.92) were paid in 2019. The cost of printing and distribution of Tayf 14 (£432.79) were paid for by the previous Treasurer (HCT Morris) in 2018 but reimbursed in 2019 and hence appear on this year’s accounts.

(F) The insurance premium for 2018-2019 (£254.60) were paid by HCT Morris in 2018 but he was not reimbursed until 2019 and hence the figure appears in this year’s accounts alongside the current year, totalling £529.20.

(G) Whilst the Auditor, Mrs Sally Rae was paid £25 for auditing the 2018 and 2019 accounts this does not appear on the accounts until 2020 when the Treasurer was reimbursed.

(H) Admin costs of £9.00 were paid in 2019.

SGK, May 28th, 2020
FRIENDS OF SOQOTRA (UK Charity Number 1097546)

Accounts for 01/01/2019 to 31/12/2019

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>INCOME</th>
<th>01/01/2018 to 31/12/2018</th>
<th>01/01/2019 to 31/12/2019</th>
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<tr>
<td>Membership subscriptions</td>
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<td>£942.09 (A)</td>
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<td>Donations</td>
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<td>£285.15 (B)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Interest</td>
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<td>£2.59</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Totals</strong></td>
<td><strong>£1,774.70</strong></td>
<td><strong>£1,229.83</strong></td>
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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>EXPENDITURE</th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Projects</td>
<td>£1,918.03</td>
<td>£1,340.34 (C)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Website Domain</td>
<td>£0.00</td>
<td>£470.32 (D)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tayf costs</td>
<td>£0.00</td>
<td>£1,207.30 (E)</td>
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<td>(Tayf 14)</td>
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<tr>
<td>... (Tayf 15)</td>
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<td>Insurance Premium</td>
<td>£0.00</td>
<td>£529.20 (F)</td>
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<td>Auditor’s fees</td>
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<td>£25.00 (G)</td>
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<td>Admin. Costs</td>
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<td>£9.00 (H)</td>
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<td><strong>Totals</strong></td>
<td><strong>£1,918.03</strong></td>
<td><strong>£4,413.08</strong></td>
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BALANCE IN THE ACCOUNT ON 31/12/19 £4,562.53

Accounts audited and original signed by Sally Rae

Sally Rae, 28.5.2020
### Appendix 3. Key Activities

Main target dates are the weeks before the Virtual Meeting (between 15 and 30 April 2021) and the AGM (between 15 and 30 September 2021) for updating on activities.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Activity</th>
<th>Lead</th>
<th>Target Date(s)</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>AGM + Conference</td>
<td>KVD, FA</td>
<td>30 November 2020 (Dates+Venue)</td>
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<td></td>
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<td>28 February 2021 (First Circular)</td>
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<td></td>
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<td>31 July 2021 (Second Circular)</td>
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<td>15 September 2021 (Final Programme)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Archive</td>
<td>MR, PM</td>
<td>31 March 2021 (First update)</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>September 2021 (AGM)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Awareness Materials</td>
<td>RS</td>
<td>31 March 2021 (First update)</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>September 2021 (AGM)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Financial Report</td>
<td>MT</td>
<td>September 2021 (AGM)</td>
</tr>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>31 December 2021 (Charity Commission)</td>
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<td>Governance and Privacy Policy</td>
<td>KVD</td>
<td>31 March 2021 (First update)</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>September 2021 (AGM)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Membership List Updates</td>
<td>FP</td>
<td>Continuous (Updated Monthly)</td>
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<td>Membership Engagement</td>
<td>FP supported by HA</td>
<td>31 March 2021 (First update)</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>September 2021 (AGM)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Projects, Mangroves</td>
<td>HA</td>
<td>31 March 2021 (First update)</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>September 2021 (AGM)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Projects, Other</td>
<td>KVD; cf. SC</td>
<td>31 March 2021 (First update)</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>September 2021 (AGM)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Social Media</td>
<td>KVD</td>
<td>Continuous (Updated Monthly)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Tayf (FoS Newsletter)</td>
<td>HH</td>
<td>31 March 2021 (Articles in)</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>31 August 2021 (Final)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Virtual Meeting</td>
<td>KVD, FP</td>
<td>Between 15 and 30 April 2021</td>
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<tr>
<td>Website Updates</td>
<td>DP</td>
<td>31 March 2021 (First update)</td>
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<td></td>
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<td>September 2021 (AGM)</td>
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For abbreviations of names, see Attendants and Apologies. SC - subcommittee
Appendix 4. Objects
(see www.friendsofSoqotra.org)

OBJECTS
The Association is established to promote the sustainable use and conservation of the natural environment of the Soqotra island group and in so doing to support sustainable improvement in the standard of living of the people of Soqotra through:

a) Raising awareness of the global significance of the Soqotran culture, environment and natural resources, and of any proposed actions which might have an impact on these.

b) Supporting successful traditional Soqotran natural resource management practices and promoting all protective statutes and designations.

c) Promoting practical and action-oriented research and encouraging its application and implementation.

d) Facilitating the integration of research with the delivery of practical projects prioritised by the Soqotran community.

e) Providing a source of expertise, assistance and training for the people of Soqotra.

f) Providing educational materials and support for the young people of Soqotra.

g) Co-operating with governmental, academic and voluntary organisations in Yemen and elsewhere which have similar aims to this Association.

h) Influencing tourism to develop in a manner which maintains and enhances the indigenous Soqotran culture and natural environment.