What is Polis?

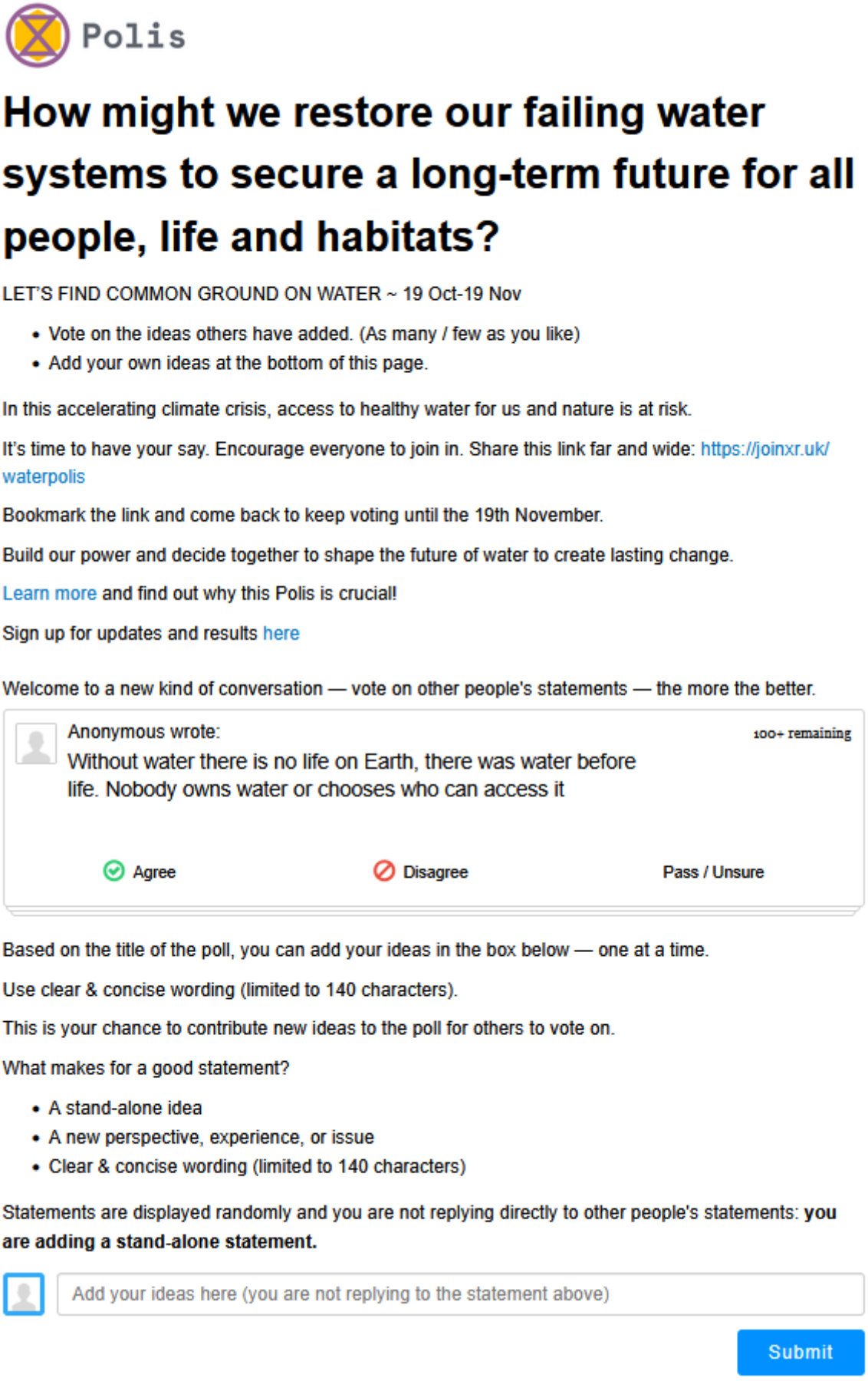
Polis is an interactive, inclusive and fair online tool that helps groups of people have conversations and make decisions together. It’s especially useful when you want to understand what a large group thinks about a given topic, as it gathers and organises opinions shared by participants.

> “ Polis is an open-source platform that helps entire cities, states, or even countries find common ground on complex issues. It's been stress tested in tens of thousands of conversations with more than ten million participants worldwide. By collecting and analyzing viewpoints from thousands of participants, Polis reveals points of consensus, even on topics that seem deadlocked.

What makes Polis special is that it allows for everyone involved in a conversation to have an equal chance to share their views; everyone is included. Also, it offers opportunities for extended conversations over days, weeks or even months, until consensus is reached.

This movement towards a consensus is helped by smart processes going on in the background; the algorithm presents those statements that more people agree with. As ideas are increasingly agreed with, they will show up more often to help take the exploration of a topic and the discussion forward. It can also identify different clusters of opinions too.

This is how it might look - this example was from the 'Finding Common Ground on Water' project



Here you see two ways to participate:

- firstly by choosing to 'agree' / 'disagree' or select 'pass/unsure'

- secondly, you can add your own ideas in the box with the head and shoulders icon to the left of it and then hit 'Submit'. This is what makes it different to a poll, where the agenda for voting is set by the polling organisation; by adding your own ideas into Polis, you are shifting the agenda.

It helps us see what a whole community thinks, not just the loudest voices.

Polis doesn't allow back and forth arguments, so trolls are sidelined.

For a fuller explanation of the value of Polis, jump to our Benefits of Using Polis page.

Who Uses Polis?

Governments, cities, and organisations around the world use Polis to shape policies or decisions **based on real input from the public**. Taiwan is the poster child and worth exploring. (See case study below)

How We Use Polis in XR

Polis can be a stand-alone tool, or used in conjuction with assemblies. Using Polis can strengthen community assembly processes by **harvesting the 'wisdom of the crowd'**. It produces understandable statistical reports. As the analysis can be shared publicly at the end of a conversation, this process is transparent.

If you would like to take part in using this exciting new way of decision-making, or if you have any questions, or need support with XR's Polis tool, contact the UK Assemblies team.

Case Study - Polis in Taiwan

What happened? The government of Taiwan used **Polis** to help decide how to regulate **Uber**, which was a controversial issue. Taxi drivers, Uber drivers, government officials, and everyday citizens all had different opinions.

The problem: People strongly disagreed. Taxi drivers wanted protection, while Uber users wanted cheaper, safe and flexible rides. Traditional public meetings turned into shouting matches with no real progress.

How Polis helped: The then Digital Minister, Audrey Tang, invited the public to use Polis online. Thousands of people participated by voting on statements and adding their own ideas. Polis grouped people into **clusters** of opinion i.e. people who supported Uber vs people who didn’t.

Most importantly, it found **shared values** across those groups, such as:

- Drivers should be insured.
- Prices should be transparent.
- Passengers deserve safety.

The result: Polis helped the government find **areas of agreement** that everyone could live with. These ideas shaped new regulations that balanced safety, fairness, and innovation. Because people saw their voices reflected in the results, they were more willing to accept the final regulations.

This opened the door to Polis being used more widely by the Government in engaging the public in other policy decisions.

Why it Works in Taiwan and Elsewhere:

The government made decisions based on **common ground**, not just opinions from lobbyists or activists. People in Taiwan are now much more engaged in decision making about issues impacting their daily lives.

In this video [17 mins] Audrey Tang talks about how Polis was used to help pass laws with public inclusion.

https://www.youtube.com/embed/LscTx6DHh9I?si=nD4qVwsmGGn8Kt7Q&start=510
