

# THE CASE OF RARE EARTH ELEMENTS



## **Activists Group: You are the Executive Director of a Prominent International Environmental Advocacy Organization**

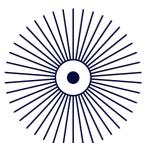
### **Your Background and Biography**

You're an executive director at one of the world's most prominent environmental advocacy organizations. For almost 50 years your group has been acting to stop environmental destruction, end deforestation, and raise antinuclear awareness. With a few million donors worldwide and affiliated organizations operating in more than 50 countries, your organization helps shape environmental politics around the world.

Your organization is most famous for nonviolent direct action, where small groups of brave activists make bold protests. Your members have sailed into nuclear bomb test sites, stood in front of harpoons to save whales, and climbed into smokestacks to shut down coal-fired power plants. But your group also does research, influences corporations, and educates consumers if that's what needs to be done to stop destruction. In fact, your organization helped to invent the concept of sustainability seals back in the 1990s. Mobilizing consumers seemed a good way to protect the environment when government regulators refused to act.

But you've become gradually disenchanted with sustainability seals over the last 15 years. It's not clear if they really work to make conditions better on the ground. You personally led a 10-year effort to strengthen one well-known sustainability seal, only to have to end your organization's endorsement of it when the reforms you advocated for never took hold.

You have campaigners on the ground in China, and they've been remarkably effective in reducing air and water pollution from coal plants. That's in part because your people work within an informal set of boundaries that is also beneficial to the national government. Often the leaders of authoritarian governments, such as the Communist Party in China, have trouble getting accurate information about what's going on at the local level. Your organization's engagement with local people helped government leaders realize that deadly pollution was beginning to undermine their authority and control. Maybe the people hurt by rare earths are better protected by local action rather than by yet another global campaign focused on consumers.



So you enter this negotiation unsure if your group should support a Sustainability Seal for rare earth production. A prominent organization such as yours would provide a big boost for the seal's credibility and potential effectiveness. But if the criteria laid out in the seal are too weak to actually change anything, then you will have helped "greenwash" a lot of companies that are still polluting the environment and poisoning people.

In the negotiation you will argue for a strong Sustainability Seal with verifiable, measurable targets, so your organization can know if the seal is actually working. Transparency is a high priority, with as much publishing and sharing of information as possible. Finally, you want a seal that rewards and advances products that use recycled rare earths in order to reduce new mining as much as possible.

### **Your Mission**

Your goal at this hearing is to convince the Stewardship Council to include the Activists Group's recommendations in its final Sustainability Seal guiding values. To make this argument effectively, you must do the following:

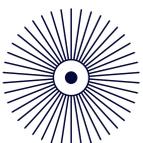
- Complete the assigned readings listed at the bottom of this page.
- Work closely with the other members of your group to develop clear answers to the Stewardship Council's questions.
- Use as much specific information as possible to develop strong arguments for your position that protecting the environment and promoting human well-being (physical and economical) are critical to establishing a sustainable, ethical rare earth elements industry.
- Read as much as you can about your position and the positions of the other groups.
- Complete written reflections on your character, interest group, and readings as assigned.

### **Your Victory Objectives**

- **You will receive 10 points** if the Stewards select your group's proposal as the final Sustainability Seal guiding values.
- The Stewards will rank the interest groups by how well their goals are represented in the final Sustainability Seal guiding values. **You will receive between 1 and 4 points** based on how the Activists Group is ranked and how well the Sustainability Seal guiding values reflect your goals.

## **SOURCES**

### **Group Sources**



- Activists Case Study: ["Protecting Health and the Environment in an Age of Global Trade"](#)
- Ives, Mike. ["Boom in Mining Rare Earths Poses Mounting Toxic Risks."](#) *Yale Environment 360*, January 28, 2013.

### **Individual Sources**

- Conniff, Richard. ["Greenwashed Timber: How Sustainable Forest Certification Has Failed."](#) *Yale Environment 360*, February 20, 2018.
- Dembicki, Geoff. ["China's Fast Path to Green Tech."](#) *Tyee*, November 27, 2012.
- Greenpeace International. ["Greenpeace International to Not Renew FSC Membership."](#) Press release, March 26, 2018.

