POLITICAL REPRESENTATION OF NATURE

Updated 23.2.2026, latest version can be found <u>here</u>.

Join the debate in Chapter 6!

About The Planetary Democrats

The Planetary Democrats is a political association headquartered in Hamburg, Germany. The association is guided by holistic environmental ethics and considers the entire planet and all its natural beings to be valuable, both individually and as a whole. The association does not see itself as a representative of nature but uses participation in European Parliament elections as an opportunity to spark debates and to support the implementation of new institutional mechanisms for the political representation of nature.

INTRODUCTION

The debate over the most effective implementation of political representation of nature has gained momentum in recent years. Scientific publications (*Non-Human Nature in World Politics*, *Planet Politics*, *Politics of Nature*, *Political Representation of Nonhuman Animals*) and several civil society organisations and projects (*Embassy of the North Sea*, *Organisms Democracy*, *Planetary Personhood*, *Animals in Democracy*, *Animals in the Room*) have addressed the issue. The debate is driven by several emerging trends, such as the *political turn* in environmental ethics and the *representative turn* in political theory. In the context of several advances in the *legal* representation of nonhuman nature (Whanganui River, Mar Menor), the scope of the discussion is now being extended to issues surrounding the representation of nature in the *legislative* and *executive* branches of government.

This policy paper contributes to the ongoing debate and provides new proposals for the design of various institutional mechanisms for the political representation of nature. The paper focuses on a novel Planetary Parliament, which is characterized by the global representation of all natural beings (plants, fungi, animals, microorganisms, lithosphere, hydrosphere, atmosphere, cryosphere).

In this paper, the terms planet, nature and natural beings include human beings. The term more-than-human is met with sympathy but is not used here as it may not be understood by everyone and as it is hard to translate to other languages. The technosphere is viewed as a part of nature that was modified by human activities, with the modification not legitimizing a separate political representation.

REASONS FOR THE POLITICAL REPRESENTATION OF NATURE

The implementation of institutional mechanisms for the political representation of all natural beings is morally desirable and provides practical benefits to humanity and the whole planet.

2.1 MORAL REASONS

The highest good of democracy is its legitimacy, which arises from the greatest possible consent and participation. The all-affected principle, one of the most fundamental principles of democratic theory,[1] states that all those affected by a decision should be involved in the decision-making process. Since political decisions frequently impact the integrity of nature, it follows that nature ought to be included in these processes. When decisions that restrict, damage, or endanger natural beings are made without their representation in relevant political institutions, they suffer from a deficit in democratic legitimacy.

This observation necessitates a critical reassessment of the conventional assumption that political representation should be contingent upon specific cognitive, communicative, or moral capacities. In the context of the Anthropocene, human claims to exclusive political agency have often been justified by appeals to a presumed moral and cognitive superiority.[2] As a thought experiment, consider a scenario in which humans discover that Earth lies within the jurisdiction of a superior interstellar species. Despite our inferiority, we would undoubtedly insist on having a voice in decisions affecting our environment and existence. This illustrates that the entitlement to representation cannot coherently be based solely on relative capabilities.

By the same logic, humans should not deny other natural beings on planet Earth their right of representation despite their differences. Holistic environmental ethicist Martin Gorke contends that the universal character of morality prohibits the exclusion of any

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[1] Karlsson, J. (2006). Affected and Subjected – The All-Affected Prinicple in Transnational Democratic Theory. *Wissenschaftszentrum Berlin für Sozialforschung*, *Discussion Paper SP IV 2006-304*.

[2] Simplican, S. C. (2015). *The Capacity Contract: Intellectual Disability and the Question of Citizenship*. University of Minnesota Press. http://www.jstor.org/stable/10.5749/j.ctt13x1m8v

natural being from the moral community.[3] The concepts of biodiversity and geodiversity promote the appreciation of all forms of life and inanimate nature.[4] Many Indigenous cultures and new materialist thinkers offer holistic approaches to valuing natural beings without subdividing them into biotic and abiotic beings.[5]

2.2 PRACTICAL REASONS

The existing evidence on planetary boundaries indicates that our global political system has had limited success in solving planetary problems,[6] likely due to flawed decision-making processes rather than the development and implementation of effective political instruments. Several political instruments have proven effective at the national or continental level. For example, the German federal government significantly improved water quality in German rivers with the Wastewater Tax Act of 1976, which put a price on environmental pollution. At the continental level, the European Union reduced coal power emissions by 43% from 2013 to 2019 with its Emissions Trading System.[7] Rather, the difficulty in solving planetary problems lies in making the decision to use suitable solution instruments.

Unlike in national or continental parliaments, decisions at the global level are not made according to the majority principle but according to the unanimity principle. UN conferences of the parties (COPs) are equipped with nearly 200 vetoes, which renders decision-making slow or even impossible. A transition to the majority principle would enable compromises that are oriented around the interests of all rather than the interests of those who desire the least change.

Evidence suggests that the political representation of nature would have a positive influence on the solution of planetary problems. While current politicians are beholden to their human constituents, nature's representatives would be beholden to the entire

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[3] Gorke, M. (2013). The Death of Our Planet's Species: A Challenge To Ecology And Ethics. Island Press.

[4] Gray, M. (2013). Geodiversity: Valuing and Conserving Abiotic Nature. John Wiley & Sons.

[5] Many thanks to Prof. Veronica Strang for pointing this out.

[6] Richardson, K., Steffen, W., Lucht, W., Bendtsen, J., Cornell, S., Donges, J. F., Drüke, M., Fetzer, I., Bala, G., Von Bloh, W., Feulner, G., Fiedler, S., Gerten, D., Gleeson, T., Hofmann, M., Huiskamp, W., Kummu, M., Mohan, C., Bravo, D., . . . Rockström, J. (2023). Earth beyond six of nine planetary boundaries. *Science Advances*, *9*(37). https://doi.org/10.1126/sciadv.adh2458

[7] Hockenos, P. (2020). *The EU's Emissions Trading System is Finally Becoming a Success Story*. Energy Transition. Retrieved February 19, 2024, from https://energytransition.org/2020/11/the-eus-emissions-trading-scheme-is-finally-becoming-a-success-story/

planet, representing different needs and requirements in a more balanced way. Although it is in the interests of the people entitled to vote to protect nonhuman nature, it is also in the interest of the people entitled to vote to exploit natural resources. Historically, the disruption of the earth system has been almost exclusively due to human activities.

The political representation of nature can also be used to protect parts of nature in which humans have no direct interest or stake. Animals that are popular with humans, such as elephants or whales, garner more support than less popular entities like mosquitoes or soil organisms. Humans often forget that our planet is a connected system.

The positive effects of political representation on those who are represented was demonstrated through the introduction of women's suffrage. Thanks to the persistence of a <u>female</u> member of parliament, Elisabeth Selbert, equal rights for women and men were included in the German constitution in 1949. The criminalization of marital rape in 1997 was also only achieved thanks to a cross-party alliance of <u>female</u> MPs.

OPERATIONAL CHALLENGES

Several operational challenges must be overcome to realize the benefits of political representation of nature mentioned in the previous section.

3.1 EPISTEMOLOGICAL CHALLENGES

Unlike politicians, representatives of nature cannot speak with the entities they represent. They are therefore faced with the challenge of identifying the needs and requirements of the entities they represent without being able to receive direct feedback. Where politicians use citizen dialogs, surveys, and correspondence to communicate with their constituents, new tools must be developed for nature's representatives to acquire insights regarding the needs and requirements of those they represent.

Despite these challenges, an effective nature conservation policy is already possible with the current level of information on the needs and requirements of nature. The mere assumption that all natural beings have an intrinsic value and a right to exist is sufficient to derive effective measures for their protection. For example, humans know that it is not in the interests of nature to cut down a forest or discharge toxins into a river.

3.2 MOTIVATIONAL CHALLENGES

Elected representatives' interest in being re-elected normally ensures that they will try to perform their duties well and act in the best interests of their voters. If elected representatives fail to act responsibly or fail to deliver on their campaign promises, they may be voted out of office by the people they represent. Nonhuman nature cannot evaluate the work of its representatives nor vote independently; thus, there is no control mechanism for the representatives of nature.[8]

A further complicating factor is that representatives of nature must explicitly represent the interests of nature rather than their personal interests, whereas politicians often represent positions with which they identify. This factor makes it necessary to develop new types of control instruments for representatives of nature to ensure that they act in the best interest of the entities they represent and to avoid misuse of power.

However these challenges are not new to existing democracies. Survey findings indicate that people tend to be dissatisfied with the work of politicians, despite the control functions already in place. Nevertheless, it is important to the majority of people to live in a democracy.[9]

3.3 PRACTICAL CHALLENGES

Practical challenges also arise when individual species or individuals of a species have conflicting interests. It is particularly challenging to weigh conflicting interests related to nonhuman nature due to the lack of communication options. It is therefore important to develop instruments to measure the relative importance of different needs when weighing conflicting interests of individual species or individuals.

Nonhuman natural beings cannot react to legislative proposals; thus, conflicting interests are difficult to identify. It is therefore necessary to pursue a pluralistic approach to determine how best to meet the needs and requirements of nature.

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[8] Ball, T. (2006). Democracy. In *Cambridge University Press eBooks* (S. 131–147). https://doi.org/10.1017/cbo9780511617805.009

[9] Pew Research Center. (2024). Representative Democracy Remains a Popular Ideal, but People Around the World Are Critical of How It's Working. Retrieved May 19, 2024, from https://www.pewresearch.org/global/wp-content/uploads/sites/2/2024/02/gap_2024.02.28_democracy-closed-end_report.pdf
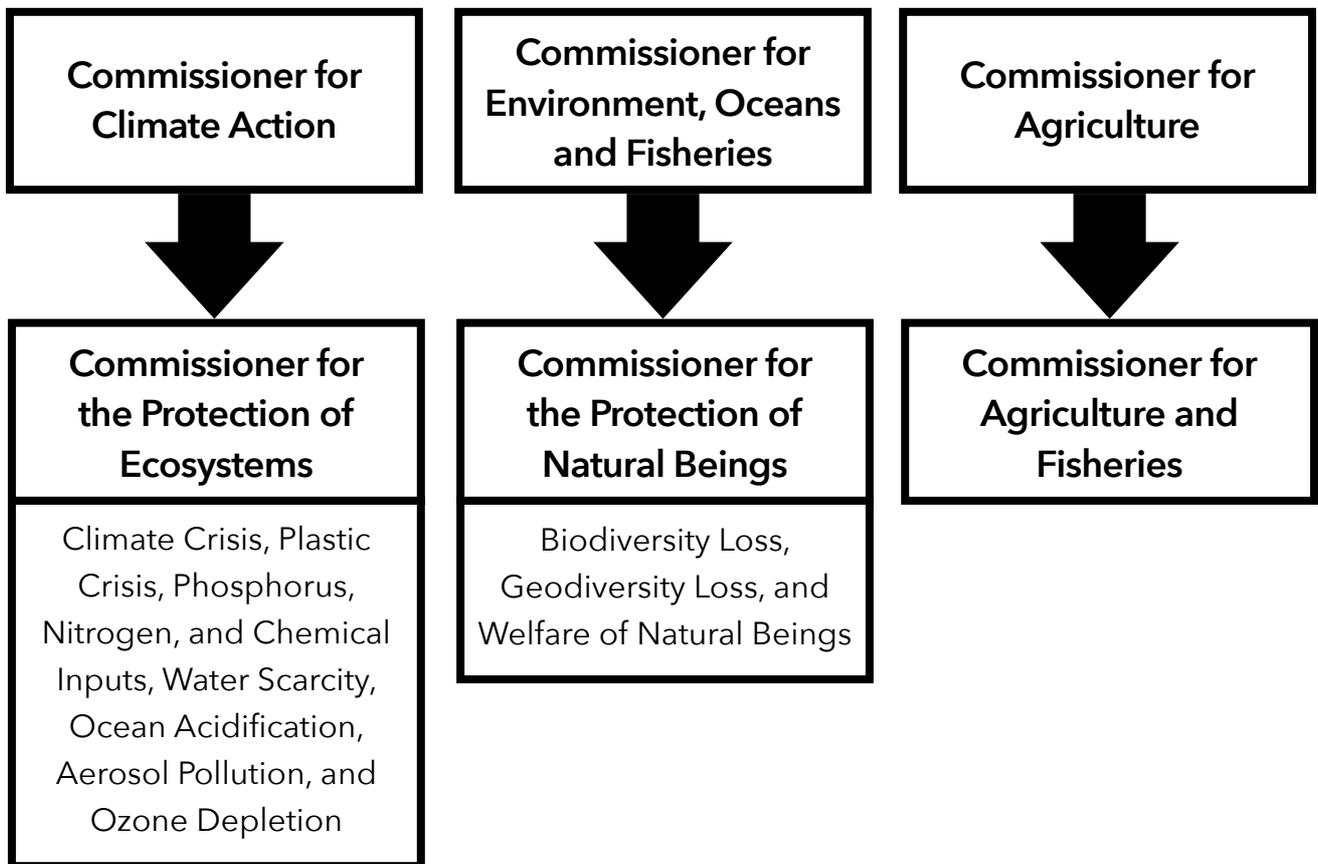
DESIGN OF THE INSTITUTIONAL MECHANISM

Given the operational challenges described in the previous section, institutional mechanisms for the political representation of nature must have certain features to fulfil their purpose. The short- and medium-term implementation of the Planetary Parliament seems unlikely; therefore, we propose two additional mechanisms at the EU level. These mechanisms are easy to implement and are important steps toward the creation of a Planetary Parliament.

4.1 EUROPEAN COMMISSIONERS FOR NATURAL BEINGS AND ECOSYSTEMS

The EU Commission is the only EU body that has the right of initiative, which means it has the power to develop draft laws that may be subsequently adopted by the EU Parliament and the Council of the EU. The representation of natural beings in the EU Commission is therefore of particular importance to ensure the representation of nature's interests. The EU Commission currently has a Commissioner for the Environment, Oceans, and Fisheries; a Commissioner for Climate Action; and a Commissioner for Health and Food Safety, who is also responsible for animal welfare. To avoid conflicts of interest and strengthen the rights of nature, we propose assigning commissioners responsibility for the protection of natural beings and ecosystems.[10] Without increasing the number of commissioners, we propose the following restructuring and distribution of responsibilities:

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[10] See also: GAIA. (2021). Petition for an EU Animal Welfare Commissioner. EU for Animals. Retrieved January 15, 2024, from https://www.euforanimals.eu

Commissioner for Climate Action	Commissioner for Environment, Oceans and Fisheries	Commissioner for Agriculture
↓	↓	↓
Commissioner for the Protection of Ecosystems	**Commissioner for the Protection of Natural Beings**	**Commissioner for Agriculture and Fisheries**
Climate Crisis, Plastic Crisis, Phosphorus, Nitrogen, and Chemical Inputs, Water Scarcity, Ocean Acidification, Aerosol Pollution, and Ozone Depletion	Biodiversity Loss, Geodiversity Loss, and Welfare of Natural Beings	

To overcome the epistemological challenges mentioned in the previous section, we recommend that the commissioners seek regular exchanges with scientists, members of indigenous communities and other stakeholders. Such exchanges will provide information on diverse aspects of issues from different perspectives and offer the commissioners feedback on their work. Some of these meetings should be organized in public panel format. We also recommend that the commissioners take regular excursions to endangered ecosystems during their term of office to promote competencies for empathy and offer a nature-centred perspective.

More advanced institutional mechanisms could address the previously mentioned motivational challenges for commissioners. Rather than being elected by member states, commissioners for the protection of natural beings and ecosystems should be nominated by environmental organisations, as defined in Article 11 of the Aarhus Regulation.[11]

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[11] Council of the European Union & European Parliament. (2006). REGULATION (EC) No 1367/2006. EUR-Lex. Retrieved February 19, 2024, from https://eur-lex.europa.eu/eli/reg/2006/1367/oj

These organisations meet special requirements and have experience in the representation of nature in court. However, environmental organisations should not nominate candidates from among their members. Rather, they should use their expertise to nominate candidates who have the necessary expertise, motivation, and empathy to selflessly represent natural beings and ecosystems in the Commission.

The proposed nominees would be questioned and elected by Parliament. There are significantly more environmental organisations in Europe than positions to be filled in the Commission; therefore, a two-stage election procedure is recommended. In the first stage, environmental organisations would nominate one candidate for Commissioner for the Protection of Natural Beings and one candidate for Commissioner for the Protection of Ecosystems. The candidates would answer a written questionnaire, and each Member of the European Parliament would cast one vote for each position.[12] In the second stage, the five candidates who received the most votes for each position would be invited to Parliament for verbal questioning by Parliament and a secondary election. To further mitigate the lack of control functions described in the previous section, the term of office for Commissioners would be limited to one legislative period.

4.2 EU NATURE PARLIAMENT

To strengthen the voice of natural beings at the parliamentary level, we propose the creation of an EU Nature Parliament. This legislative body can initially be set up as an advisory body in a rudimentary form and subsequently developed into a proper parliament in several stages.

First, we propose the introduction of an expert group with 16 members,[13] appointed by and reporting to the members of the Commission for the Protection of Natural Beings and Ecosystems. The expert group should consist of 8 subgroups with 2 members in each: plants, fungi, animals, microorganisms, lithosphere (rocks), hydrosphere (waters), atmosphere, and cryosphere (ice). The expert group is tasked with researching the needs and requirements of natural beings and ecosystems and developing suitable policy instruments. The expert group is not an independent body and has no rights of its own;

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12 European Commission. (2022). QUESTIONNAIRE TO THE COMMISSIONER-DESIGNATE. Virginijus Sinkevičius - European Commission. Retrieved January 16, 2024, from https://commissioners.ec.europa.eu/system/files/2022-12/answers-ep-questionnaire-sinkevicius.pdf

13 European Commission. (n.d.). Expert groups explained. Register of Commission Expert Groups and Other Similar Entities. Retrieved February 19, 2024, from https://ec.europa.eu/transparency/expert-groups-register/screen/expert-groups-explained?lang=en

rather, its purpose is to report and provide comprehensive information to the Commission. It is also intended to gather practical experience and normalise the political representation of nature to support the development of institutional mechanisms for the political representation of nature.

Next, we propose the creation of an EU Nature Parliament. This new legislative body should comprise 80 seats—10 for each political group—and be filled by direct election. The EU electoral law should provide for a second vote, which will allow EU citizens to vote for lists of candidates for the EU Nature Parliament in the European elections. Unlike the first vote, candidates are nominated not by political parties but by environmental organisations, as described above. Organisations will nominate qualified external personalities, not representatives from within the organisation.

This second step will grant the EU Nature Parliament additional rights, including the power to request the Commission to carry out investigations and submit corresponding legislative proposals with a simple majority of its members. In addition, the EU Nature Parliament will be entitled to issue opinions on legislative proposals before they are examined at first reading in the EU Parliament. Further, the EU Nature Parliament will have the right to send a delegation to the trilogue, an informal negotiation meeting between the EU Commission, the EU Parliament, and the Council of the EU. At these meetings, the delegates may speak but not vote.

Finally, we propose that the EU Nature Parliament be enlarged to 400 seats and expanded into a fully-fledged Parliament with an independent right of initiative. It will be several years before this step occurs, and, likely, the EU's other legislative bodies will also have been reformed by that time. There are some indications that the EU Parliament's position regarding the Council of the EU and the EU Commission will be strengthened in the future.[14] Against this background, the EU Parliament and the EU Nature Parliament assume the main functions in our proposal, with the EU Parliament regulating relations between human beings (intraspecific legislation) and the EU Nature Parliament regulating relations between all natural beings (interspecific legislation). Each parliament would have the final say in its own legislative area, and both would have to agree on legislation affecting both areas. If it is unclear whether a legal act has intraspecific characteristics, interspecific characteristics or both, the EU Commission would make an initial decision and the Court of Justice of the EU would make a final decision.

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14 European Parliament. (2023). Future of the EU: Parliament's proposals to amend the Treaties. Retrieved May 19, 2024, from https://www.europarl.europa.eu/news/en/press-room/20231117IPR12217/future-of-the-eu-parliament-s-proposals-to-amend-the-treaties

The revised procedure for the adoption of a new legislative proposal with interspecific or intra- and interspecific characteristics would be as follows:

1. The EU Commission, the EU Parliament, or the EU Nature Parliament submits a legislative proposal by a simple majority.

2. The EU Parliament and the EU Nature Parliament adopt a legislative proposal either at first or second reading.

3. If the two institutions fail to reach an agreement at the second reading, a Conciliation Committee is convened.

4. If the version agreed upon by the Conciliation Committee is acceptable to both institutions at the third reading, the legislative act is adopted. If no agreement has been reached in the Conciliation Committee and the legislative proposal has intra- and interspecific characteristics, the law is deemed to have failed.

5. If the legislative proposal has only interspecific characteristics, an objection by the EU Parliament with an absolute majority may be rejected by the EU Nature Parliament with an absolute majority. An objection by the EU Parliament with a 2/3 majority may be rejected by the EU Nature Parliament with a 2/3 majority. In either of these cases, the legislative proposal would be enacted.

The EU Nature Parliament must include extensive expertise from a range of perspectives to meet the epistemological challenges outlined in the previous section. Hence, it is recommended to involve scientists, members of indigenous communities and other stakeholders from different disciplines and backgrounds. In addition, public dialog formats will provide a suitable mechanism to integrate additional knowledge into the EU Nature Parliament. Political groups will organise regular excursions to various ecosystems to directly familiarize themselves with, experience, and appreciate these ecosystems. To ensure that the expertise of the EU Nature Parliament translates to the development of effective political instruments, the legislative period will be preceded by training in parliamentary work. This training will remove barriers to entry and ensure that MEPs can be recruited from an extensive and diverse group of people. MEPs will also be supported in their work by experienced EU officials, who will help them formulate strategic measures.

4.3 THE PLANETARY PARLIAMENT

Our planet is overall an interconnected system, and natural phenomena have an impact across national borders; thus, natural beings must be represented politically at the global level. We recommend the development of a Planetary Parliament for this purpose. Like the EU Nature Parliament, the Planetary Parliament will have 400 seats. There will be 50 seats reserved for each parliamentary group: plants, fungi, animals, microorganisms, lithosphere (rocks), hydrosphere (waters), atmosphere, and cryosphere (ice).

A combination of two procedures is recommended for the appointment of members of the Planetary Parliament. The first half of the seats are drawn at random from among all citizens of the world. This provides the parliament with a high degree of legitimacy, as everyone has an equal chance of being appointed and all population groups are fairly represented. The second half of the seats are allocated by election to experts for natural beings to bring a high level of expertise to Parliament. The legislative term is preceded by training in parliamentary work. All candidates must also take an oath to act selflessly and solely in the interests of the entities they represent.

The Planetary Parliament is not intermingled with or fused with the executive branch. This is to overcome government-opposition dynamics, which would not help to represent the planet as a whole. The right to introduce bills will be exercised by the parliamentary groups. Executive tasks, namely the implementation of adopted measures, will be carried out by a commission elected by the parliament. The Planetary Parliament will not be dependent on conventional political parties. Thus, political processes will be characterized by cooperation rather than competition. Civil society organisations will nominate candidates and draw up the electoral lists. By nominating external experts, the election process will focus on competing for the best ideas rather than maintaining and expanding power.

It will be several years before the Planetary Parliament is established; thus, it is likely that other global bodies and systems of supranational decision-making will have been reformed by then. For example, the UN system does not currently have a parliamentary assembly (UNPA). However, a strong campaign for the establishment of such an assembly has been joined by 1,850 delegates from 137 countries and 4 continental parliamentary institutions.[15] When both bodies have been established, the UNPA and the Planetary Parliament assume the main functions in our proposal, with the UNPA regulating relations

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[15] Campaign for a UN Parliamentary Assembly. (2024). Supporters. Retrieved January 17, 2024, from https://www.unpacampaign.org/supporters/

between human beings (intraspecific legislation) and the Plantary Parliament regulating relations between all natural beings (interspecific legislation). Each parliament would have the final say in its own legislative area, and both would have to agree on legislation affecting both areas. If it is unclear whether a legal act has intraspecific characteristics, interspecific characteristics or both, the International Court of Justice would make a final decision.

The revised procedure for the adoption of a new legislative proposal with interspecific or intra- and interspecific characteristics would be as follows:

1. The UNPA or the Planetary Parliament submits a legislative proposal by a simple majority. The United Nations General Assembly (UNGA) may issue an opinion on the proposal.

2. The UNPA and the Planetary Parliament adopt a legislative proposal either at first or second reading.

3. If no agreement is reached between the two bodies by the second reading, a Conciliation Committee is convened.

4. If the version agreed upon by the Conciliation Committee is acceptable to both bodies at the third reading, the act is passed. If no agreement has been reached in the Conciliation Committee and the legislative proposal has intra- and interspecific characteristics, the law is deemed to have failed.

5. If the legislative proposal has only interspecific characteristics, an objection by the UNPA with an absolute majority may be rejected by the Planetary Parliament with an absolute majority. An objection by the UNPA with a 2/3 majority may be rejected by the Planetary Parliament with a 2/3 majority. In either of these cases, the legislative proposal would be enacted.

This bicameral approach is not intended to follow a conceptual dualism but to reflect that some decisions affect only human beings (intraspecific legislation). While a unicameral approach might send a stronger signal for a unified planet, nonhuman beings might not have preferences or lack the legitimization to make decisions on human-specific issues like labour standards, education, equality between humans or healthcare for humans.[16]

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[16] Please join the debate on pros and cons of uni- and bicameral approaches in the comment section in Chapter 6.8.

IMPLEMENTATION

In addition to the operational challenges described in previous sections, the implementation of new political mechanisms is a primary challenge to the political representation of natural beings. In this section, we offer recommendations for the successful implementation of the mechanisms described in this paper.

5.1 EUROPEAN COMMISSIONERS FOR NATURAL BEINGS AND ECOSYSTEMS

The President of the European Commission is responsible for the allocation and distribution of the European Commission's departments, and such allocations and distributions are determined at the beginning of the legislative period. However, it is possible to change the structure of the portfolios at any time. The implementation of EU Commissioners for Natural Beings and Ecosystems would therefore be comparatively simple and quick to implement. There is no need to amend EU treaties, and the European Council, the Council of the EU, and the EU Parliament do not need to give their consent.

5.2 EU NATURE PARLIAMENT

It would also be easy to implement the first step toward an EU Nature Parliament by establishing the framework for an expert group with 16 Type A members under Resolution C(2016)3301. Formal expert groups can be established by the EU Commission, and informal expert groups can be set up by an individual Commission department.

The second and third steps toward establishing an EU Nature Parliament involve the creation of a new decision-making body and a secondary vote for the election of candidates to the EU Nature Parliament. These steps would require a reform of the EU treaties and an update to the European Electoral Act. First, the Parliament's Committee on Constitutional Affairs (AFCO) must draw up a reform proposal. The EU Parliament must adopt the proposal by a simple majority, and the Council must agree unanimously

to form a convention to reform the European treaties. The established agreement must then be ratified by all the national parliaments of the EU member states.[17]

The Louise Weiss building in Strasbourg, which is empty for most of the year, offers a suitable location for the EU Nature Parliament to convene.

5.3 THE PLANETARY PARLIAMENT

Integration of the Planetary Parliament into an existing supranational system such as the United Nations would be preferable to avoid redundant structures. Implementation of the Planetary Parliament could occur simply by means of a resolution adopted in accordance with Article 22 of the UN Charter, which states: "The General Assembly may establish such subsidiary organs as it deems necessary for the performance of its functions."

In this case, the Planetary Parliament would primarily have an advisory function. A resolution of the General Assembly would be sufficient to establish this body. The approval of the Security Council would not be required, and there would be no right of veto for individual states. Ratification by the states would also not be necessary.

A reform of the UN Charter would be necessary for the Planetary Parliament to be able to make decisions that are binding under international law and to sanction violations. Based on Article 109 (1) of the UN Charter, a general conference to review the Charter may be convened by a two-thirds majority in the General Assembly and by a decision of any nine members of the Security Council. According to Article 109 (2), any amendment to the Charter recommended by the general conference by a two-thirds majority shall enter into force as soon as it has been ratified by two-thirds of the UN members, including all five permanent members of the Security Council. Any amendment to the UN Charter is subject to a veto by the permanent members of the Security Council.[18]

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[17] Consolidated version of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union, Part Six, Title I, Chapter 1, Section 1, Article 223

[18] Brauer, M., & Bummel, A. (2020). A United Nations Parliamentary Assembly: A Policy Review of Democracy Without Borders.

OPEN DEBATE

We invite the scientific community and the public to join the debate on the political representation of nature. We are happy to publish comments and proposals in this section to facilitate a fruitful debate. We are particularly interested in the following research questions and welcome all contributions. Please feel free to formulate speculative insights on questions that cannot be answered with certainty yet!

6.1 Does the inclusion of natural beings in the moral community imply that their political representation is morally desirable?

6.2 Can the political representation of nature make an effective contribution to overcoming the ecological crisis?

6.3 How should institutional mechanisms for the political representation of nature be best designed?

6.4 How should nature's representatives be selected or elected in order to ensure a high legitimization?

6.5 Which tools and practices are best suited to enable nature's representatives to identify the needs and requirements of the entities they represent?

6.6 Which procedures and mechanisms are best suited to ensure that nature's representatives act in the best interest of the entities they represent and to avoid misuse of power?

6.7 How can the relative importance of the distinct needs and requirements of different entities be measured when weighing up conflicting interests?

6.8 How and where should institutional mechanisms for the political representation of nature be integrated into the current political system?

6.9 Other comments and ideas

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hello@planetary-democrats.org

6.1 DOES THE INCLUSION OF NATURAL BEINGS IN THE MORAL COMMUNITY IMPLY THAT THEIR POLITICAL REPRESENTATION IS MORALLY DESIRABLE?

<u>Prof. Veronica Strang, environmental anthropologist. Associate, School of Anthropology and Museum Ethnography at the University of Oxford, and Fellow of the Academy of Social Sciences:</u> I would ask whether the inclusion of non-human beings and ecosystems in a 'moral community' is necessary for there to be a moral or ethical imperative to provide them with representation. Framing this issue around a 'moral community' rather suggests that they have moral responsibilities, but this is hardly reasonable: moral judgements are human (and cultural) constructs depending on human forms of sentience. In considering the representation of non-human beings through an approach described as 'Re-imagined Communities' they are simply included as members of a planetary community of living beings. Is this not sufficient for them to have representational rights?

<u>Dr. Stefanie Fishel and Prof. Anthony Burke, Principals, Planet Politics Institute:</u> We hold the view that more-than-human beings, ecosystems, and the biosphere have moral value by virtue of their entangled, symbiotic, and vibrant existence on planet Earth. The same holds for humans. While the lives and sentience of animal individuals is important and worthy of rights, it is our ecosystemic relations and dependencies that matter, because they include and support all life including human life. We depend on nature for our food, our drugs, and our security. Nature has value because humans are a part of nature, it pre-exists us by hundreds of years, and it represents our evolutionary heritage. Every second, we breathe air that has twice the concentration of carbon dioxide than it did in 1800, which connects us all into the climate emergency. In a world overly structured by binary thinking, this is an epochal binary choice: we either value and honour nature, or we destroy it and thus ourselves.

<u>Melanie Challenger, writer and broadcaster, Deputy co-chair of Nuffield Council on Bioethics, Vice President of RSPCA, and co-founder of Circe/Animals in the Room:</u>
I believe that recognition that other living beings are moral subjects and not moral patients makes their political representation not just desirable but necessary. One need not necessarily commit to a specific philosophical position for this. Some may argue political rights are grounded in agency, others in dignity, and still others that other living beings are subjects of justice on the "all affected principle". But we can also just note that other living beings are members of our community, workers within our systems, and agents affected by decisions in a shared world. As such, they qualify for representation.

Anna Mikhaylovskaya, PhD Candidate, Global & Local Governance Department, Rijksuniversiteit Groningen: As a political philosopher with an interest in participatory and deliberative democracy, I would agree that it could be argued that the inclusion of natural beings in the moral community should, ideally, also imply their political representation. The ideal of deliberative democracy, as well as other related concepts such as open democracy (put forward by Landemore), imply that all the relevant groups directly affected by political decisions should have the right to be involved in and represented in political decision-making. Considering many political decisions directly affect the well-being and health of natural beings and the natural world, we can suggest that all these entities do have a moral right to be politically represented. If we come up with mechanisms and structures that would allow us to legitimately represent non-human entities in politics, this could lead to more equitable, inclusive policies that better account for the needs of the broader natural world, beyond just humans.

Pablo Magaña, PhD, Center for Animal Ethics and Law & Philosophy Research Group of Pompeu Fabra University: I am not sure that inclusion in the moral community implies political representation, but it does certainly strengthen the case. If animals are morally considerable entities, and if they have their interests disregarded because policy-makers have no strong incentives to take them into account, then we have good reasons to think of ways to redesign our representative institutions. When political theorist Terence Ball asked a US state legislator why elected representatives paid so little attention to future generations and nonhuman animals, the legislator quickly replied: "Because they don't vote." If that is indeed what is going on, any attempt to move towards a less anthropocentric and speciesist society must pay attention to institutional design and inclusive policy-making if it doesn't want to leave an important part of the problem unaddressed.

Attila Antal, PhD, senior lecturer in Political Science, Eötvös Loránd University Faculty of Law Institute of Political Science: Involving nature and natural beings in the political community and giving them political representation is not only a moral but also a practical political duty. In an era of climate and ecological crisis, the foundations of liberal democracies and the representative institutions of parliamentary systems have been fundamentally disrupted. The extraordinary measures put in place in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic foreshadow the radical strengthening of executive power and the radical weakening of representative institutions everywhere in the first half of the 21st century. If it depends on the political realism of the executive power, we will never have a meaningful response to the ecological and climate crisis. The only answer is to strengthen representative institutions with solutions that ensure that nature can finally

have real political representation. Our current planetary crisis has been caused by global capitalism's increasing disconnection of political systems from those they are supposed to represent and by the increasing influence of the capitalist system on political power. In other words, the many crises facing humanity (polycrisis) are precisely the result of global capitalism's disconnection from the natural foundations and commodification of nature, while the representative institutions that are supposed to counterbalance these processes have been completely weakened. If we do not involve nature in our representative institutions and at the same time reinvigorate them, global crises will bury our political and social systems.

6.2 CAN THE POLITICAL REPRESENTATION OF NATURE MAKE AN EFFECTIVE CONTRIBUTION TO OVERCOMING THE ECOLOGICAL CRISIS?

<u>Prof. Veronica Strang, environmental anthropologist. Associate, School of Anthropology and Museum Ethnography at the University of Oxford, and Fellow of the Academy of Social Sciences:</u> Democratic representation effectively establishes power relations. Just as women have been disempowered by the structural inequalities pertaining in patriarchal political systems, so too have the species and elements composing the non-human domain. Much therefore depends upon the extent to which democratic representation of the needs and interests of the non-human domain can be integrated into core decision-making processes and the degree of parity that they can achieve with the representation of human interests. The ecological crisis can only be addressed by recognising the unequal power relations that have led to the overriding of non-human interests.

<u>Joana Castro Pereira, Professor of Politics and International Relations at the Faculty of Arts and Humanities of the University of Porto:</u> Nature's political representation can contribute meaningfully to overcoming the (socio)ecological crisis – but only if embedded in a transformative, multispecies framework rather than treated as a minor institutional reform. The crisis is rooted in multispecies injustices and political structures that obscure the interdependence between humans and non-humans. The systematic exclusion of nature from decision-making processes sustains extractivist logics and reinforces a structural democratic deficit. Recognising nature as a subject of political concern can therefore help redress this imbalance. Yet effectiveness depends on institutional design. If representation amounts merely to symbolic proxies without reshaping power relations, production systems, and destructive political economies, its impact will remain marginal. By contrast, when grounded in multispecies justice – encompassing distributive, recognitional, epistemological, and interspecies dimensions – it can strengthen prevention, adaptation, and long-term governance capacities.

Crucially, the socioecological crisis is not only a normative or institutional failure; it is materially embedded in infrastructures, value chains, and socioecological metabolisms that organise ecologies and unevenly distribute risks and benefits. Addressing it therefore requires transforming these material arrangements: reconfiguring production systems, reshaping land use, and fostering regenerative and life-sustaining forms of coexistence. Practices of care, restoration, and cohabitation must move from localised initiatives to politically supported transformations that reconstruct the material conditions of multispecies life. In sum, nature's political representation can be a powerful lever for change – but only as part of a broader project of normative, institutional, and socioeconomic transformation oriented towards multispecies resilience and justice. Otherwise, it risks remaining largely symbolic.

<u>Melanie Challenger, writer and broadcaster, Deputy co-chair of Nuffield Council on Bioethics, Vice President of RSPCA, and co-founder of Circe/Animals in the Room:</u> There is a tension in the first two questions. How are we defining natural beings and who do we think is being represented? If we only represent "nature", we risk flattening the rights of other living beings who are individuals with conflicting interests. There's a critical but often overlooked tension between individual rights and representation in the political sense and rights of aggregates like "nature" or "species" or "ecologies". It is important to note those tensions and to move forward ethically. The most important step to overcoming the ecological crisis is challenging human exceptionalism, and there are some inherently anthropocentric aspects to approaches that absorb individual organisms and communities into human concepts like "nature".

<u>Anna Mikhaylovskaya, PhD Candidate, Global & Local Governance Department, Rijksuniversiteit Groningen:</u> This is a question that is difficult to fully answer without empirical evidence, but I do believe that having nature represented politically can have a positive effect on decision-making around the ecological crisis and climate policies. We know from other governance structures that if certain (human) groups are not structurally included in decision and policy-making, their needs and interests are much more likely to be sidelined or ignored. Thus, if we would have a mechanism for representing the non-human entities in official decision-making bodies in a more direct way, it would at the very least put the issues relevant for the natural world more in the center of the political agenda. More diversity of stakeholders could lead to more pressure for pushing forward the policies to overcome the environmental issues.

Pablo Magaña, PhD, Center for Animal Ethics and Law & Philosophy Research Group of Pompeu Fabra University: Honestly, I think this is a complex empirical question which we are not in a position to answer conclusively. But there are reasons to be optimistic. Reasons, at the very least, to experiment with more inclusive representative institutions. First, we normally think, in the case of humans, that if some collective is not represented— if it is, in short, left outside the political agenda—it is likely that the interests of its members will be disregarded. Second, there is some evidence that when animal parties get seats in parliaments, animal issues receive greater attention—precisely because it becomes easier to introduce them into the political agenda. This does not imply that animals will receive better protection. But, again, it does give us reasons to tinker with our institutions—perhaps, first, at a local level, and then scaling-up if the results are positive.

6.3 HOW SHOULD INSTITUTIONAL MECHANISMS FOR THE POLITICAL REPRESENTATION OF NATURE BE BEST DESIGNED?

Prof. Veronica Strang, environmental anthropologist. Associate, School of Anthropology and Museum Ethnography at the University of Oxford, and Fellow of the Academy of Social Sciences: While it may be practical to begin by creating alternate representational structures, I would suggest – as much as practically possible – extending existing institutional mechanisms to encompass democratic representation for non-human beings and ecosystems. This integration has several advantages: (a) it is intellectually coherent in reflecting an understanding that all species inhabit and co-create a single world; (b) it does not require populations to encompass or support more than one democratic process, with possible conflicts between them; (c) it places the representation of the non-human domain where it needs to be, at the heart of existing decision-making processes, and (d) it provides a single and more level playing field in which competing needs and interests can be more fairly negotiated.

Melanie Challenger, writer and broadcaster, Deputy co-chair of Nuffield Council on Bioethics, Vice President of RSPCA, and co-founder of Circe/Animals in the Room: We have been experimenting with human democracy for thousands of years, and we still don't have representation quite right. We must assume that we will also make mistakes as we seek to expand the polis to other beings. The most important work to be done at this stage is experimentation and evaluation so that we can begin to develop evidence-based frameworks for representation. We shouldn't rush into forms of representation that could result in acts of injustice towards other living beings.

Pablo Magaña, PhD, Center for Animal Ethics and Law & Philosophy Research Group of Pompeu Fabra University: As a philosopher, I am not particularly well-suited to answer empirical questions about what works best in practice. I am, however, sympathetic to the following arrangements.

First, specific commissioners for animals and future generations. For these positions we should select individuals with a publicly demonstrated concern with environmental or animal-rights issues—who will be more intrinsically motivated to speak on behalf of animals or future generations, and less liable to opportunistic behavior. There is some evidence that, when perceived as non-partisan, ombudpersons can increase the attention certain issues receive—children's problems, human rights, etc. So, they could also work for animals as well. And, because ombudpersons typically lack formal decision-making powers, they would avoid the legitimacy challenges that other proposals face—for example, those seeking to empower specific representatives with formal decision-making power and guaranteed seats in parliament.

Second, adopting proportional electoral systems. Those systems make it easier for small political parties—like green or animal parties—to enter into parliament and get a fair hearing.

Third, I do not think any proposal will be workable unless affective and ideological polarization levels decrease. This is because, due to negative polarization, proposals that might have received ample support are likely to be rejected by many simply because they are defended by one's political rivals. In Spain, for instance, a recent proposal by the left-wing ruling coalition to dismantle a national award for bull-fighters has met with a counter-proposal in regions governed by the right-wing opposition, who want to create their own regional awards for bull-fighters. When political polarization is high, the effective protection of animals' and posterity's interests becomes more difficult.

I am, as things stand now, a bit skeptical about the possibility of appointing specific representatives. Nevertheless, I do think we should seize any opportunity we find to experiment with such arrangements at a small scale.

6.4 HOW SHOULD NATURE'S REPRESENTATIVES BE SELECTED OR ELECTED IN ORDER TO ENSURE A HIGH LEGITIMIZATION?

	Problem		Proposed Solutions
6.4	The fact that nonhuman nature cannot participate in elections poses a challenge for the legitimization of its representatives.	6.4.a	A process where a human electorate votes on behalf of nonhuman nature offers a great legitimization towards humans. Restricting the right to propose candidates to environmental organisations helps increase legitimization towards nonhuman nature. This restriction doesn't come with a democratic deficit, as the establishment of environmental organisations is open to everyone. The exclusion of internal candidates limits the power of environmental organisations and, thus, their legitimacy requirements.
		6.4.b	In a variation to 6.4.a, candidates might nominate themselves and an electoral commission decides if they meet certain requirements regarding impartiality, expertise and motivation.
		6.4.c	A process where seats are drawn at random offers high legitimacy to humans by granting everyone the same chance. On the downside, this approach might have less legitimacy towards nonhuman beings, as it may bring less intrinsic motivation and expertise on their needs and requirements to the parliament.
		6.4.d	Several thinkers try to sidestep this problem in the constructivist turn in representation. John O'Neill agues that in the absence of authorisation, accountability, and presence, legitimization to speak on behalf of others can arise from knowledge of their objective interests. Robyn Eckersley goes further and argues that authority to represent nature might also derive from other forms of 'moral capital' like a reputation acquired through a long history of research and campaigning or particular cultural practices such as nature poetry, creative writing or the production of nature documentaries. O'Neill, J. (2001). Representing People, Representing Nature, Representing the World. Environment And Planning. C, Government & Policy/Environment And Planning. C, Government And Policy, 19(4), 483–500. Eckersley, R. (2011). Representing nature. In S. Alonso, J. Keane, & W. Merkel (Eds.), *The Future of Representative Democracy* (pp. 236–257). chapter, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Prof. Veronica Strang, environmental anthropologist. Associate, School of Anthropology and Museum Ethnography at the University of Oxford, and Fellow of the Academy of Social Sciences: I feel that this should be an open process, so as not to be exclusive, but with rigorous criteria for selection. These would centre on impartiality (i.e. excluding

conflicts of interest); on proven expertise (whether academic or based on experience); and track record in promoting non-human rights and interests. As with the structural arrangements, it would seem reasonable – most particularly to ensure legitimacy – to replicate existing 'human' processes as much as possible, with candidates meeting these criteria seeking democratic election. It is likely that conservation organisations would field and support particular candidates, and provided that elections are open and democractic this is workable. In some contexts it would be appropriate to ensure that there are representational roles for Traditional Owners / local Indigenous representatives. The key challenge would be to establish clear selection criteria and to balance these with open democratic processes. This potentially demands a higher standard of selection than currently pertains in some contexts for human representation, but this could be justified in a situation where the parties represented cannot speak for themselves. It may be possible to draw on guidelines such as those ensuring proper representation for similarly disadvantaged parties, such as minors.

<u>Melanie Challenger, writer and broadcaster, Deputy co-chair of Nuffield Council on Bioethics, Vice President of RSPCA, and co-founder of Circe/Animals in the Room:</u> Again, this needs to be evidence-based and evaluated, and there will be no confident or clear answers for now. Who is "nature"? Why do we seek to represent "nature"? What does flourishing look like for "nature" or the individuals who come under this banner? The best approach for now is probably to have representatives that are also held to account by other structures that can reduce anthropocentric or cultural bias. Are we genuinely taking care of other living beings or are we finding ways to protect nature for the sake of humans? Answers to these questions will alter who should represent.

<u>Anna Mikhaylovskaya, PhD Candidate, Global & Local Governance Department, Rijksuniversiteit Groningen:</u> It is clear that such representatives should be selected/ elected based on their demonstrated commitment to and knowledge of environmental entities to be represented. However, how exactly the selection process for such representatives would work is a complex question that I'd say will require a lot of further discussions. It could be that certain environmental organizations or other relevant stakeholders could nominate potential candidates, and the final representatives would be selected through some kind of election/voting process. But one could also imagine that after nominations are done the final selection is made through a lottery, to ensure a fair and transparent process where none of the potential nominees have an advantage over others due to their influence, public popularity, etc. Additionally, such positions could be rotated on a somewhat regular basis to ensure the diversity of expert perspectives.

6.5 WHICH TOOLS AND PRACTICES ARE BEST SUITED TO ENABLE NATURE'S REPRESENTATIVES TO IDENTIFY THE NEEDS AND REQUIREMENTS OF THE ENTITIES THEY REPRESENT?

	Problem		Proposed Solutions
6.5	Nature's representatives face epistemological challenges because they cannot speak to the entities they represent.	6.5.a	A pluralistic approach that takes a variety of viewpoints and methodologies into account can ward off the risk of bias. Therefore, scientists, members of indigenous communities and other stakeholders from different disciplines and backgrounds should be involved, either as representatives or on an advisory panel for representatives. Public dialogue formats can be a suitable mechanism for providing representatives with additional knowledge.
		6.5.b	Digital democratic tools and platforms can help nature's representatives to gather input on various environmental issues from a variety of different stakeholders.

<u>Prof. Veronica Strang, environmental anthropologist. Associate, School of Anthropology and Museum Ethnography at the University of Oxford, and Fellow of the Academy of Social Sciences:</u> Ideally elected representatives would have expertise in relevant areas, and this could constitute a key selection criterion. But more than one area of expertise may be needed, and there is then a question as to how best to provide this, either by having a range of expert representatives, or by supporting representative roles with advisory panels providing more varied expertise. There is no one-size-fits-all formula – the key criterion is that representatives have or have access to the expertise necessary to identity the needs and interests of the entities they are representing. In most cases there will be substantial research available to inform them, and this could also be commissioned if necessary.

<u>Melanie Challenger, writer and broadcaster, Deputy co-chair of Nuffield Council on Bioethics, Vice President of RSPCA, and co-founder of Circe/Animals in the Room:</u> This is a huge question and, again, not one we can rush into. This needs to be studied and evaluated. When we represent anyone, we are making knowledge claims about them. Whose knowledge matters and how and why do they have this knowledge? Scientists definitely have a role in understanding the preferences and interests of other beings, but should their science be subject to inclusive and ethical processes? Some people with knowledge of landscapes and other beings have knowledge because they have a stake in exploiting them. Do we regard this as a conflict of interests and as subject to bias? Do we need a range of human actors to develop sufficient and trust-worthy knowledge

claims about the flourishing and interests of living beings? These aren't trivial questions and are critical to debate.

Anna Mikhaylovskaya, PhD Candidate, Global & Local Governance Department, Rijksuniversiteit Groningen: Suitable tools and practices should be primarily identified by those who are eligible to represent non-human entities' interests. Nevertheless, I believe digital tools and platforms could have significant potential in this regard. Digital democratic innovations are already gaining popularity as a possible way to gather people's inputs on a variety of issues (e.g., participatory budgeting, policy consultations), and it is feasible to imagine that these types of platforms could also be designed to help nature's representatives to gather input on various environmental issues from a variety of different stakeholders - for instance, scientists, environmental organizations, activists etc. Digital platforms could be used to gather the views and perspectives of all these relevant actors in one place, and possibly even facilitate different stakeholders in coming to a compromise or agreement on particular issues via the use of argument maps or deliberative practices.

6.6 WHICH PROCEDURES AND MECHANISMS ARE BEST SUITED TO ENSURE THAT NATURE'S REPRESENTATIVES ACT IN THE BEST INTEREST OF THE ENTITIES THEY REPRESENT AND TO AVOID MISUSE OF POWER?

	Problem		Proposed Solutions
6.61	Since nonhuman nature is not able to evaluate and control the work of its representatives, a lack of accountability arises, which leads to motivational challenges.	6.61.a	The process in 6.4.a offers a surrogate accountability as environmental organisations try to propose candidates that have publicly demonstrated their intrinsic motivation, empathy, and expertise to selflessly represent nonhuman nature.
		6.61.b	Regular excursions to endangered ecosystems during their term of office can promote competencies for empathy and offer a nature-centred perspective to representatives.
		6.61.c	Limiting the term of office to one legislative period can mitigate the risk of power misuse arising from limited control functions.
		6.61.d	A lottocratic selection of representatives with periodic rotation of those representatives would help to avoid the power struggle among the candidates, which usually arises when representatives are elected by voting.

6.62	There is a great responsibility on the organisations that nominate candidates, which entails risks that we already know from existing democratic systems, such as the exertion of influence through financial means, favoritism, or forced loyalty to leaders.	6.62.a	To reduce the influence of financial resources on the election, it should not be allowed for organisations to campaign for the list of candidates, they nominated. Voters should make their decision based on the reputation the organisations have earned through their regular work. To enforce this, it is possible to allow organisations to nominate candidates only if they spend more than X % of their budget on direct conservation measures or to limit spending on advertising and campaigning.

Prof. Veronica Strang, environmental anthropologist. Associate, School of Anthropology and Museum Ethnography at the University of Oxford, and Fellow of the Academy of Social Sciences: One of the advantages of embedding representation of the non-human domain within existing democratic processes is that there will be multiple parties observing and critiquing the process and its outcomes. While non-human beings and entities cannot add to this critique, they can and will respond to the decisions that are promoted and enacted. Ecologists already have well established methods of gauging the health of ecosystems, looking at indicator species, populations, biodiversity etc. This makes it possible to do prior 'condition surveys' and measure progress or regression, just as current democratic processes measure the efficacy of representational process through regular checks on social and economic indicators.

Melanie Challenger, writer and broadcaster, Deputy co-chair of Nuffield Council on Bioethics, Vice President of RSPCA, and co-founder of Circe/Animals in the Room: As above, but I think generally individuals or bodies claiming to represent other beings should not have conflicts of interest (like exploiting those organisms, for example) and the whole process should be subject to scrutiny for anthropocentric values. No human or human group should claim to represent nature without taking seriously that other living beings have interests and can define their own good.

Anna Mikhaylovskaya, PhD Candidate, Global & Local Governance Department, Rijksuniversiteit Groningen: As I mentioned above, a potential mechanism to ensure that nature's representatives act in the best interest of the natural entities they represent is to select those representatives via lottery (from a pool of nominees put forward by, for instance, environmental organizations and other relevant stakeholders). Lottocratic selection of representatives with periodic rotation of those representatives would help to avoid the power struggle among the candidates, which usually arises when representatives are elected by voting. If potential candidates know that their selection

depends on a fair and transparent lottery procedure and is limited time-wise to a particular term, there would potentially be less space and incentive for them to misuse their power (which is more likely to happen when candidates compete for votes). Of course, there should also be other mechanisms and checks and balances in place, such as clear ethical guidelines and rules on the scope of power and responsibility awarded to these representatives, and there should be independent bodies in place that are able to keep an oversight over representatives.

6.7 HOW CAN THE RELATIVE IMPORTANCE OF THE DISTINCT NEEDS AND REQUIREMENTS OF DIFFERENT ENTITIES BE MEASURED WHEN WEIGHING UP CONFLICTING INTERESTS?

	Problem		Proposed Solutions
6.7	Natural beings have very different characteristics and abilities, which makes it difficult to compare different needs and requirements with each other and to resolve conflicting preferences.	6.7.a	The concepts of biodiversity and geodiversity offer compasses to value biotic and abiotic nature. The planetary boundaries framework incorporates both concepts and provides a quantification that can be used to weigh up different objectives.
		6.7.b	The development of a classification system inspired by Maslow's hierarchy of needs, but applicable to all natural beings, can provide orientation for nature's representatives.
		6.7.c	Non-binary voting systems offer a mechanism to prevent majority groups from imposing decisions on minorities without accounting for their interests. The modified Borda count has been proposed as a method to identify the option with the highest average preference score among all participants, ensuring a more inclusive and representative decision-making process.

Prof. Veronica Strang, environmental anthropologist. Associate, School of Anthropology and Museum Ethnography at the University of Oxford, and Fellow of the Academy of Social Sciences: This is both an ethical and practical question. Should all entities have the right to have their basic needs and interests met? Ethically most proponents of non-human rights would agree that they should. This suggests a practical base line that must be maintained. An example is the notion of 'minimal flows' applied in river catchments, which supposedly ensures that the redirection of water into human interests does not deprive the river of sufficient flows to maintain its ecological viability. Implicitly, this sets a

limit on levels of exploitation. This suggests that decision-making should be guided by an expectation that no party's interests can be met to the extent that they override the basic needs of other entities, but that provided all entities basic needs are met, then other social and economic factors may be weighed and their relative importance negotiated. Protecting the basic needs of all entities within ecosystems is, in fact, wholly practical in that it ensures the sustainability of the system, and thus benefits all parties. As such it represents a common good, a concept that is, in essence, expressed by a vision of interspecies democracy.

<u>Melanie Challenger, writer and broadcaster, Deputy co-chair of Nuffield Council on Bioethics, Vice President of RSPCA, and co-founder of Circe/Animals in the Room:</u>
"Nature" is conflicts of interest by its nature! Organisms are in constant negotiations with one another, many of them stressful, competitive, and predatory, for example. But if we seriously wish to move beyond human exceptionalism, we also can't decide what we think "nature" ought to be. All living beings seek autonomy and freedom. When we engage in multispecies multi-stakeholder approaches to decision-making, we must accept that outcomes will only be straightforwardly measurable when we focus only on human values. Once we bring other beings into the arena, then we will find that when we try to do good for one group of beings, we may do harm to others or infringe their freedoms. The safest approach is probably to focus on individual communities of beings rather than nature as a whole, where it is easier to include and track successful representation and deliberate on conflicts to arrive at reasonable compromises.

6.8 HOW AND WHERE SHOULD INSTITUTIONAL MECHANISMS FOR THE POLITICAL REPRESENTATION OF NATURE BE INTEGRATED INTO THE CURRENT POLITICAL SYSTEM?

	Problem		Proposed Solutions
6.8	The implementation of mechanisms for the representation of nature is likely to face strong opposition if humans have to give up political power.	6.8.a	To prevent representatives of humans from losing their parliamentary seats to representatives of nonhuman nature, new nature parliaments should be established (bicameral approach). These new nature parliaments can co-operate with the existing parliaments in a bicameral system on legislation that affects the integrity of nature.
		6.8.b	To increase acceptance of representatives of nonhuman nature in existing parliaments (unicameral approach), residual votes not used by eligible human voters could be allocated to representatives of nonhuman nature.

<u>Prof. Veronica Strang, environmental anthropologist. Associate, School of Anthropology and Museum Ethnography at the University of Oxford, and Fellow of the Academy of Social Sciences:</u> Now, everywhere, and at all levels of the system. As noted above, there is a good case for setting up new democratic structures independently: it would be much easier to get them established, and would lay some foundations for more integrated approaches. A more direct effort to integrate representatives for non-human entities into current 'human' democratic arrangements would undoubtedly raise anxiety and opposition. But there is also a risk that a lot of time and energy could be expended in establishing alternate arrangements which may or may not have much impact on the status quo. And the status quo is not sustainable. So I would favour a steady process of introducing innovative democratic measures into existing democratic arrangements as much as possible, at every level: panels of experts representing river catchment or other ecosystem communities; new local Council roles; new Ministerial roles at regional and national levels; new EU commissioners, and new UN roles, all bringing democratic representation for non-human entities into the room.

<u>Dr. Stefanie Fishel and Prof. Anthony Burke, Principals, Planet Politics Institute:</u> A planetary politics is by necessity a multispecies politics, and it is not a radical reform to demand representation for more-than-human beings in our democracies, our global governance systems, and our bureaucracies. We support all manner of institutional innovation and experimentation that could achieve this, and have combined with colleagues in the Institutionalising Multispecies Justice[19] volume to explore concrete ways this could occur at every level of government, and in civil society and private sectors. Our democracies will only be stronger with the inclusion of the more-than-human. However, representation in existing systems biased towards the denial and exploitation of nature is not enough; we need to reform our polities from (quite literally) the ground up, which is why we call for an "Ecology Politic".[20]

<u>Stefan Pedersen, PhD, Honorary Research Fellow, Centre for Advanced International Theory, Department of International Relations, School of Global Studies, University of Sussex:</u> One way to potentially include the planet in democratic decision-making structures – from a theoretical Planetary Parliament, via the actual European Parliament, to local government structures – would be to allocate the residual votes not used by eligible human beings to representatives for nature, or perhaps better, representatives working in the long-term planetary ecological interest. Even in the countries where voting is

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[19] Burke, A., Celermajer, D., & Fishel, S. (2024). *Institutionalising Multispecies Justice*. Cambridge University Press.

[20] Burke, A., & Fishel, S. (2025). The Ecology Politic: Power, Law, and Earth in the Anthropocene. MIT Press.

compulsory, such as in Australia, the turnout is never 100%. In Australia in 2022 the turnout was 90%, leaving a residual or unused 10% that could have been allocated to nature representation in parliament there. For the latest European Parliament election in 2024, where voting conversely is not compulsory, the residual available given the then turnout of 50.74%, was here a potential 49.26% slice of this parliament for representatives that could have given voice to more-than-human life on Earth. Many regions, city-councils, and other municipalities operate with similar, roughly 50%, turnouts in local elections, thereby leaving room for considerable planetary representation here too. The use of fossil fuels and other damaging extractivism would surely plummet if democratic politics were to start operating on a shared anthropocentric/ecocentric basis. Another upside is that lack of turnout would in this scenario go from a net-negative to a net-positive, even if a certain threshold for popular participation still ought to be set for the sake of legitimacy.

Opting for this solution would not just strengthen the rights of nature planetwide but also lend less power to political representatives aiming to undermine the public and planetary interest in an (often bought and paid for) effort to strengthen anti-democratic forces, whether these are authoritarian or industrial-extractivist or both.

In the case of a planetary parliament – the percentage of the (actual or potential) popular vote not given to the party leading the governments represented at the United Nations General Assembly (due to its first-past-the-post structure, leaving non-governing parties zero representation) could be allocated to its corresponding planetary chamber. In the case of US elections over the last decades this would amount to a roughly 33% stake on the anthro-political UNGA side and 66% on the eco-planetary side. For authoritarian states that do not hold elections, or where sham elections are held, the corresponding split could be 0% government representation and 100% planetary representatives. If this seems unfair to anyone, keep in mind that every potential voter is free to participate in elections and thereby vote for a party of their choice instead of allocating their vote to planetary representation and that every government of a nation-state can start holding free and fair elections, and encourage popular participation in these, to skew the division of power in parliaments back towards the human political or anthropocentric side. When theorizing planetary democracy, why not include democratic consistency? And, to ensure that there will always be room for planetary residual representation – why not count every human being in every polity as a potentially eligible voter? But with the caveat that children will have to initially cede their vote to planetary representatives from birth until they reach voting age themselves (for instance, until the age of 16). This way, even

compulsory voting systems, like Australia's, are left with 20% residual votes reserved for eco-centric, planetary, representation.

The radically eco-centric reform to all of our constitutions suggested here would skew politics progressively – if we agree that politics is only progressive today if it in addition to preserve human dignity also aims to ensure planetary habitability. A progressive turn in this eco-centric direction appears, like so much else that would be an improvement, as "unrealistic" given today's reactionary world political moment. But once the prevailing winds change, as they are eventually bound to, we ought to seriously consider dividing all our democratic institutions into eco- and anthropocentric chambers – on the basis that those who do not speak for themselves democratically, for reasons of immaturity or otherwise, will have allowed the Earth incremental power to speak for life instead.

And, for all practical purposes, any planetary representative worth its salt should agree that what the Earth wants, first and foremost and above all else, is the unending flourishing of life in its biosphere.

<u>Melanie Challenger, writer and broadcaster, Deputy co-chair of Nuffield Council on Bioethics, Vice President of RSPCA, and co-founder of Circe/Animals in the Room:</u> If we take representation seriously, then we should embed this throughout, at grass roots, local community level, regional, and national politics. But we must have experimentation and evidence before we rush into this. Representation for non-human beings is not easy and we shouldn't assume that we know how to do it well yet.

6.9 OTHER COMMENTS AND IDEAS

<u>Prof. Veronica Strang, environmental anthropologist. Associate, School of Anthropology and Museum Ethnography at the University of Oxford, and Fellow of the Academy of Social Sciences:</u> This is a very useful summary of key issues and potential political solutions. It is strengthened by the adoption of the theoretical position that human and non-human beings all inhabit a single, indivisible and 'living' planetary ecosystem. This does raise a question, however, over the proposal to appoint EU commissioners for 'living beings' and 'non-living nature'.[21] While these categories successfully dissolve assumptions about human exceptionalism, this seems to maintain a dualistic category of 'nature' redefined (presumably) by non-sentience. But the reality is that all living beings are materially composed of elements such as water, and cannot thrive if rivers, seas, air etc. are compromised. Material elements are part of and essential to 'living' ecosystems.

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[21] Many thanks to Prof. Veronica Strang for inspiring a revision of the proposed nomenclature in Chapter 4.1.

So I wonder quite what is being gained by separating the material world categorically, and whether we could perhaps find a less Cartesian way of describing the elements from which it is composed. I note too that the assumption these are 'non-living' is rather Eurocentric, and there are already extensive debates about the rights of rivers, mountains etc., which are seen by many groups as 'living ancestors' or 'living entities', and efforts to declare their legal 'personhood'. An international Parliament would need to embrace considerable cultural diversity in perspectives.

The idea of a Parliament for Nature is indeed novel and exciting, and I can readily see that it has the capacity to engage many different interests. However, there is an important question about separating democratic processes representing non-human rights from those governing human communities. Every structural separation reifies the conceptual dualism criticised in the policy document, and surely the aim of democratic representation is to gain equality and inclusion. Thus the notion of a separate Nature Parliament at EU and global levels does carry some risk of perpetuating the unequal power relations that lead to the exploitation of the non-human domain and the inevitable overriding of non-human needs and interests. It is therefore vital to develop effective ways of integrating the representation of the non-human domain into existing democratic processes, or at least insuring that these are interlinked.

This foregrounds a related need to reassess the ways in which structures of government, at every level, separate decision-making about different areas – economic policies, transport, housing, environment – into relatively independent siloes with varying degrees of influence and priority. More often than not this allows powerful economic departments to dominate decision-making and to marginalise relatively weak/less well-funded environmental departments. So there is a double process of integration needed, creating more 'joined up' decision-making, and making it more inclusive of non-human interests.

I agree with other commentators, that democratic representation for the non-human domain needs to be established at every level in order to be effective. My own focus has been on river catchment management. Here I have suggested an approach called 'Re-imagined Communities'.[22] This is a reference to Benedict Anderson's classic

[22] Strang, V. 2023. Water Beings: from nature worship to the environmental crisis, London: Reaktion Books.
Strang. V. 2023. 'Living Kindness: re-imagining kinship for a more humane future', H. Donner and V. Goddard, (eds). Special Issue,' Kinship and the Politics of Responsibility', *Critique of Anthropology*. 43(4) pp. 476-494.
Kopnina, H. and Strang, V. 2020. 'Re-imagining Water Management on World Water Day', *Nature Research Sustainability Community,* commissioned for World Water Day March 22nd. https://sustainabilitycommunity.nature.com/users/345065-helen-kopnina/posts/63674-re-imagining-water-management-on-world-water-day

anthropological text on 'Imagined Communities' which describes how people envisage the various human communities – kin groups, professions, recreational groups, nations etc – to which they belong. Re-imagining communities proposes that we broaden our vision of social relations to encompass the non-human communities with whom we share river catchment areas, and provide them with democratic representation in the decisions that affect them. Practically, this would entail electing a panel of experts to represent a cross-section of species and material elements in the catchment. With sensible cross-sectionality (based on the characteristics of the river catchment itself) it is likely that if a range of needs and interests are met fairly, all species and the entire ecosystem will benefit. This representational body would have a voice in all key processes of decision-making. As in the proposals for larger scale levels of democracy, such representatives would be elected based on their expertise, experience and positional impartiality. I note that this approach fully integrates democratic representation for the non-human domain into existing democratic structures.

Peter Lawrence, Adjunct Senior Researcher, Faculty of Law, College of Arts, Law and Education, University of Tasmania: Given the ecological crisis, there is an urgent need to experiment with new forms of governance at all levels. This paper makes a valuable contribution to reform ideas. There are similarities between representation of nonhuman nature and future generations of human beings; in both cases representation can only be by proxy with the representative identifying the relevant interests. There are also strong synergies in the rationales for both these forms of representation given human beings' reliance on ecosystems.[23] Lessons learnt in designing and implementing institutions representing future generations provide insights into what is likely to be effective in termss of institutions to represent nonhuman nature.[24] [25] [26] Two of the (relatively) successful institutions - the *New Zealand Parliamentary Commissioner for the Environment* and the *Future Generations Commissioner for Wales*, emphasise different values in their mandates - the former emphasising the environment, the latter emphasising the welfare of future generations and sustainability. This suggests that there is no single model (or rationale) that is valid universally, but rather mechanisms need to be developed from the bottom up, reflecting the particular societal values and cultural

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[23] Lawrence, P. (2022). Justifying Representation of Future Generations and Nature: Contradictory or Mutually Supporting Values? *Transnational Environmental Law*, *11*(3), 553–579. doi:10.1017/S2047102522000176

[24] Rose, M. (2024). Institutional Proxy Representatives of Future Generations: A Comparative Analysis of Types and Design Features. *Politics And Governance*, *12*. https://doi.org/10.17645/pag.7745

[25] Lawrence, P. & Linehan, J. (2021). Introduction to Giving Future Generations a Voice: Normative Frameworks, Institutions and Practice. In *Edward Elgar Publishing eBooks*. https://doi.org/10.4337/9781839108259.00007

[26] González-Ricoy, I., & Gosseries, A. (Eds.). (2016). *Institutions for future generations*. Oxford University Press.

context.

Political representation of nature is worth pursuing but unlikely to make a significant impact unless combined with a broader strategy. This would include tackling current obstacles to making democracy work which stem from the power wielded by corporate interests over decision-making processes and widespread neoliberal thinking. We need to restrict donations to political parties, ban fossil fuel subsidies and advertising, reform media ownership laws, and include sustainability teaching in schools. At the international level, we need to democratise global finance, green the World Trade Organisation (WTO) and reform the investment protection regime. We need reform coalitions which build common ground across different worldviews, religions and cultures.

<u>Anna Mikhaylovskaya, PhD Candidate, Global & Local Governance Department, Rijksuniversiteit Groningen:</u> For the public and current governments and international organizations (both on the local level and on the level of EU, UN, etc.) to take the idea of political representation of nature seriously, it is important that the overall ideas of inclusion of different relevant perspectives are promoted further (e.g., the general idea of a more participatory, inclusive democracy). Even though deliberative and participatory democracy is becoming more visible and more and more new initiatives are taking place, this is still very much in a development stage. To promote political representation of non-human entities, collaboration with a variety of stakeholders will be important - from environmental organizations and activists to researchers and practitioners interested in more inclusive and participatory democratic processes more broadly.

<u>Andrzej Klimczuk, PhD, Department of Social Policy, SGH Warsaw School of Economics:</u> The inclusion of nonhuman entities, and more specifically, taking into account the potential of political representation of nature, is a crucial contemporary challenge for the design, implementation, and evaluation of various public policies. For example, it is a not-obvious topic in intergenerational policy, including its aspects related to specific environmental policies, architectural policies, educational policies, and healthcare policies. A starting point may be recognising many benefits and advantages of nonhuman entities' involvement. For example, identification and estimation of added socioeconomic values and positive effects such as ecosystem services supporting human life, biodiversity protection, adaptation to climate change, acknowledging the interconnectedness of all life forms, and creating conditions for future generations' resilience and sustainable development.

Granting political representation to nature can be the central solution to foster intergenerational equity. This step can lead to creating and using more holistic and

integrated approaches to public problem-solving and more specific solutions. For example, establishing governmental or independent agencies focused on representing and safeguarding the interests of nonhuman entities, the appointment of environmental guardians or ombudspersons, development of economic incentives for nature conservation, the inclusion of ecological impact assessments in specific public policies, usage of biodiversity indicators, and establishing innovative systemic design solutions as well as participatory policymaking processes to avoid environmental and spatial-related conflicts.