

POLICY PAPER

PLANETARY  DEMOCRATS



We use „Strategic Anthropomorphism“ to enable empathy and respect for other ways of being

POLITICAL REPRESENTATION OF NATURE

Last updated: 17.06.2024

FOR MEDIA OR OTHER INQUIRIES:

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RECOMMENDED CITATION

The Planetary Democrats. (2024). Political Representation of Nature

About The Planetary Democrats

The Planetary Democrats is a political association founded in 2023 in Hamburg, Germany, to participate in European Parliament Elections. 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 elections as an opportunity to spark debates and to support the implementation of new institutional mechanisms for the political representation of nature.

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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*, *ORGANISMENDEMOKRATIE*, *PLANETARY PERSONHOOD*, *DemokraTiere*, *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 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 the Planetary Parliament, which is characterized by the global representation of living beings (plants, fungi, animals, microorganisms) and nonliving nature (lithosphere, hydrosphere, atmosphere, cryosphere).

REASONS FOR THE POLITICAL REPRESENTATION OF NATURE

The implementation of institutional mechanisms for the political representation of nature is morally desirable and provides practical benefits to humanity and the 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. The integrity of nature is often affected by political decisions; thus, nature should be involved in decision-making processes. Decisions that restrict, damage, or endanger living creatures or nonliving nature and were made without their representation in the relevant political bodies have a legitimacy deficit.

Further, it is appropriate to reconsider the premise of linking political representation to certain abilities or characteristics. In the Anthropocene, humans have justified their political supremacy over the planet based on self-certified moral and cognitive superiority. As a thought experiment, if humans were to learn that planet Earth was in the territory of a superior interstellar species, we would surely advocate that we should have a say in decisions that concern our living environment, despite our inferior abilities.

Similarly, humans should not deny other living beings and nonliving nature on planet Earth their right of representation despite their differences. Holistic environmental ethicist Martin Gorke argues that the universal character of morality prohibits the exclusion of any natural beings from the moral community.² The concept of biodiversity encompasses the appreciation of living beings, and similarly, the concept of geodiversity offers a framework for the appreciation of inanimate nature.³

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

² Gorke, M. (2013). *The Death of Our Planet's Species: A Challenge To Ecology And Ethics*. Island Press.

³ Gray, M. (2013). *Geodiversity: Valuing and Conserving Abiotic Nature*. John Wiley & Sons.

2.2 PRACTICAL REASONS

The existing evidence on planetary boundaries indicates that our global political system has had limited success in solving planetary problems,⁴ 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.⁵ 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 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 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.

⁴ 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>

⁵ 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/>

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 female 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 female 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 dialogues, 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 living beings and nonliving nature 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. Nature cannot evaluate the

work of its representatives nor vote independently; thus, there is no control mechanism for the representatives of nature.⁶

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.⁷

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 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.

Nature cannot react to legislative proposals; thus, conflicting interests related to nature 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.

⁶ Ball, T. (2006). Democracy. In *Cambridge University Press eBooks* (S. 131-147). <https://doi.org/10.1017/cbo9780511617805.009>

⁷ 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

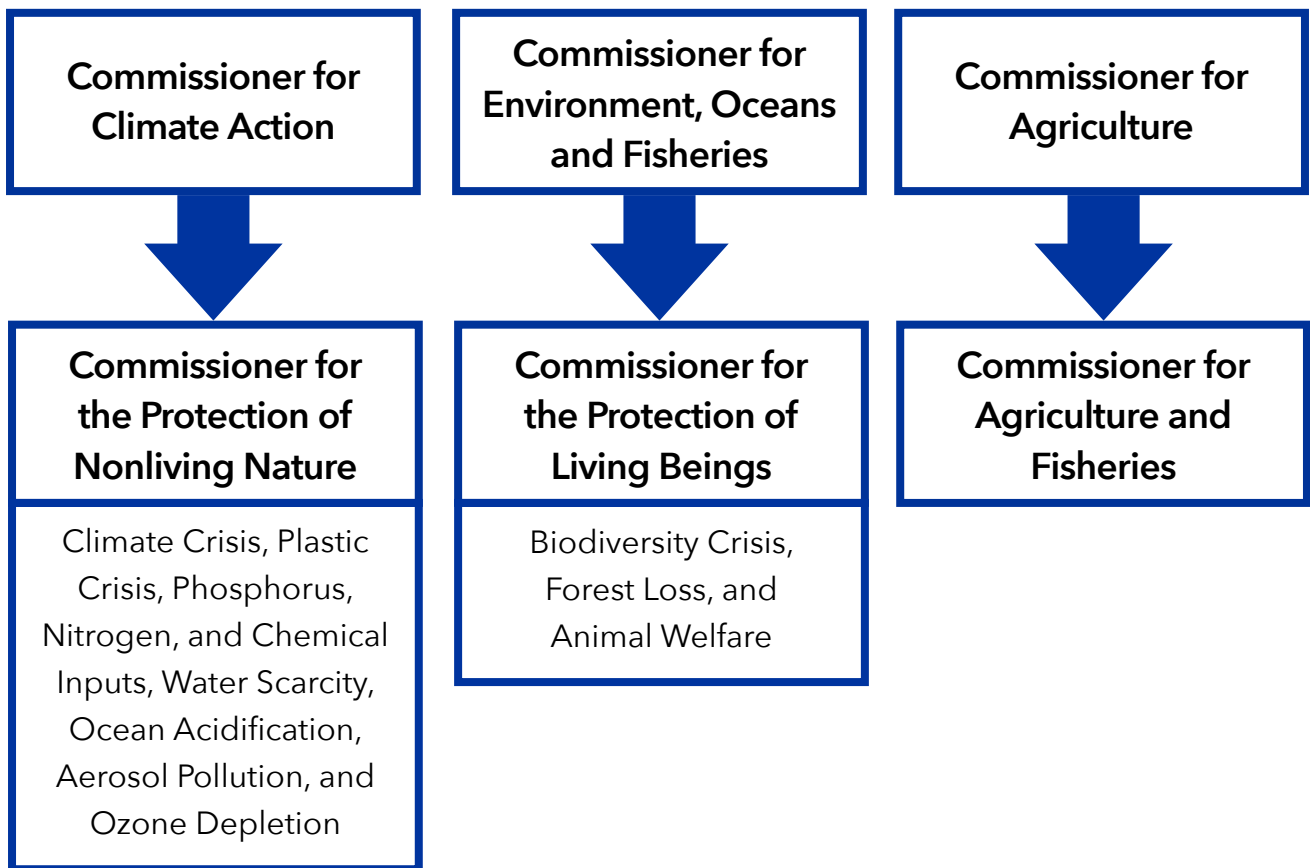
DESIGN OF THE INSTITUTIONAL MECHANISM

Given the operational challenges described in the previous section, institutional mechanisms for the political representation of nature must meet certain requirements 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 the Planetary Parliament.

4.1 EUROPEAN COMMISSIONERS FOR LIVING BEINGS AND NONLIVING NATURE

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 nature 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 living beings and nonliving nature.⁸ Without increasing the number of commissioners, we propose the following restructuring and distribution of responsibilities:

⁸ See also: GAIA. (2021). Petition for an EU Animal Welfare Commissioner. EU for Animals. Retrieved January 15, 2024, from <https://www.euforanimals.eu>



To overcome the epistemological challenges mentioned in the previous section, we recommend that the commissioners seek regular exchanges with experts in living beings and nonliving nature. 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 living beings and nonliving nature should be nominated by environmental protection organisations, as defined in Article 11 of the

Aarhus Regulation.⁹ These organisations meet special requirements and have experience in the representation of nature in court. However, environmental protection 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 living beings and nonliving nature in the Commission.

The proposed nominees would be questioned and elected by Parliament. There are significantly more environmental protection organisations in Europe than positions to be filled in the Commission; therefore, a two-stage election procedure is recommended. In the first stage, environmental protection organisations would nominate one candidate for Commissioner for the Protection of Living Beings and one candidate for Commissioner for the Protection of Nonliving Nature. The candidates would answer a written questionnaire, and each Member of the European Parliament would cast one vote for each position.¹⁰ 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 nature 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,¹¹ appointed by and reporting to the members of the Commission for the Protection of Living Beings and Nonliving Nature. The expert group should consist of 8 subgroups with 2 members in

⁹ 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>

¹⁰ 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>

¹¹ 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>

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 living beings and nonliving nature and developing suitable policy instruments. It differs from other expert groups in environmental policy in its view of the entire Earth system and the development of institutional mechanisms specifically for the political representation of nature. The expert group is not an independent body and has no rights of its own; 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.

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 protection 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.¹² Against this background, the EU Parliament and the EU Nature Parliament

¹² 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>

assume the main functions in our proposal for a separate decision-making procedure for legal acts that affect the integrity of nature. If it is unclear whether a legal act affects the integrity of nature, the EU Commission would make an initial decision and the Court of Justice of the EU would make a final decision.

The revised process for adopting a new legislative proposal 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. Only after no agreement has been reached in the Conciliation Committee is a law deemed to have failed.

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 and members of indigenous communities 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, nature 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 200 seats reserved for living beings and 200 for nonliving nature, which will be further divided into 8 subgroups with 50 seats each: 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 living beings and nonliving nature 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.¹³ When both bodies have been established, the UNPA and the Planetary

¹³ Campaign for a UN Parliamentary Assembly. (2024). Supporters. Retrieved January 17, 2024, from <https://www.unpacampaign.org/supporters/>

Parliament will assume the main functions of our proposal for a separate decision-making procedure for legal acts that affect the integrity of nature. If it is unclear whether a legal act affects the integrity of nature, the International Court of Justice will make the final decision.

The revised process for adopting a new legislative proposal 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. Only after no agreement has been reached in the Conciliation Committee is a law deemed to have failed.

The Planetary Parliament may be given the power to overrule the UNPA in certain cases to further strengthen its position. In that case, the decision-making procedure for objection laws would be extended by one step:

5. 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.

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 living beings and nonliving nature. In this section, we offer recommendations for the successful implementation of the mechanisms described in this paper.

5.1 EUROPEAN COMMISSIONERS FOR LIVING BEINGS AND NONLIVING NATURE

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 living beings and nonliving nature 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.¹⁴

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.¹⁵

¹⁴ Consolidated version of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union, Part Six, Title I, Chapter 1, Section 1, Article 223

¹⁵ 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 critiques, ideas, and suggestions in this section to facilitate a fruitful debate. We are particularly interested in the following research questions and welcome all contributions.

[Click to Join the Debate!](mailto:hello@planetary-democrats.org)

hello@planetary-democrats.org

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

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.

6.2 CAN THE POLITICAL REPRESENTATION OF NATURE MAKE AN EFFECTIVE CONTRIBUTION TO OVERCOMING THE ECOLOGICAL CRISIS¹⁶?

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.

¹⁶ 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>

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 TO OVERCOME THE ECOLOGICAL CRISIS, TAKING HOLISTIC ENVIRONMENTAL ETHICS¹⁷ INTO ACCOUNT?

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

¹⁷ Gorke, M. (2013). *The Death of Our Planet's Species: A Challenge To Ecology And Ethics*. Island Press.

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.

6.3a WHO SHOULD BE ELIGIBLE TO REPRESENT NATURE, AND HOW SHOULD NATURE'S REPRESENTATIVES BE SELECTED?

6.3b WHICH TOOLS AND PRACTICES ARE BEST SUITED TO ENABLE NATURE'S REPRESENTATIVES TO IDENTIFY THE NEEDS AND REQUIREMENTS OF THE ENTITIES THEY REPRESENT?

6.3c 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?

6.3d HOW CAN THE RELATIVE IMPORTANCE OF THE DISTINCT NEEDS AND REQUIREMENTS OF DIFFERENT ENTITIES BE MEASURED WHEN WEIGHING UP CONFLICTING INTERESTS?

6.3e HOW AND WHERE SHOULD INSTITUTIONAL MECHANISMS FOR THE POLITICAL REPRESENTATION OF NATURE BE INTEGRATED INTO THE CURRENT POLITICAL SYSTEM?

6.4 OTHER COMMENTS AND IDEAS

PROBLEM-SOLVING POOL

This problem-solving pool is a crowdsourcing tool that aims to bring problems and solutions from different teams and disciplines together. It provides an overview of identified challenges and proposed solutions. If you identify additional challenges arising from the institutional mechanisms described in this paper or if you encounter challenges regarding the political representation of nature in your own work, you are welcome to add them to the pool. We invite everyone to propose solutions to the problems listed.

**Click to add Problem
or Propose Solution**

Problem	Solution
<p>1 The fact that nonhuman nature cannot participate in elections poses a challenge for the legitimization of its representatives.</p>	<p>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 protection organisations helps increase legitimization towards nonhuman nature. This restriction doesn't come with a democratic deficit, as the establishment of environmental protection organisations is open to everyone. The exclusion of internal candidates limits the power of environmental protection organisations and, thus, their legitimacy requirements.</p> <p>b) 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 nature, as it may bring less intrinsic motivation and expertise on the needs and requirements of nonhuman nature to the parliament.</p>
<p>2 Nature's representatives face epistemological challenges because they cannot speak to the entities they represent.</p>	<p>a) A pluralistic approach that takes a variety of viewpoints and methodologies into account can ward off the risk of bias. Therefore, scientists and members of indigenous communities 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.</p>

<p>3 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.</p>	<p>a) The process in 1a) offers a surrogate accountability as environmental protection organisations try to propose candidates that have publicly demonstrated their intrinsic motivation, empathy, and expertise to selflessly represent nonhuman nature.</p>
	<p>b) Regular excursions to endangered ecosystems during their term of office can promote competencies for empathy and offer a nature-centred perspective to representatives.</p>
	<p>c) Limiting the term of office to one legislative period can mitigate the risk of power misuse arising from limited control functions.</p>
<p>4 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 objectives.</p>	<p>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.</p>
	<p>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.</p>
<p>5 The implementation of mechanisms for the representation of nature is likely to face strong opposition if humans have to give up political power.</p>	<p>a) To prevent representatives of humans from losing their parliamentary seats to representatives of nonhuman nature, new nature parliaments should be established. These new nature parliaments can co-operate with the existing parliaments in a bicameral system on legislation that affects the integrity of nature.</p>