



Group of the Progressive Alliance of
Socialists & Democrats
in the European Parliament



Nature's Rights Conference Summary - 29 March 2017 Venue: European Parliament - JAN 4Q2 - 13.00-15.00

Nature's Rights: The Missing Piece of the Puzzle

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As the destruction of the biosphere continues, we need to establish a new underlying basis for environmental law to succeed in reversing ecological destruction and increasing our resilience. The citizens of Europe are launching a European Citizens Initiative to propose that we include nature's right to exist, thrive and regenerate in EU law and political decision-making processes.

Rights of nature is a game-changing solution that brings fundamental and systemic transformation to our legal and economic system by re-characterising nature - ecosystems and other species - as subjects of the law with legal personality and tangible rights that can be defended in court by people. From this, systems of ecological governance that empower communities and align with how ecosystems operate can emerge along with the requirement to embed this in all areas of policy.

Granting nature the status of a subject of the law acknowledges the obvious interdependent relationship between humankind and the rest of nature. It establishes a legal duty of care towards nature which brings in obligations and empowers communities to proactively protect nature using the law. As a tool for addressing power imbalances, the rights of nature are a powerful counterbalance to corporate rights and the financialisation of nature. Additionally, it is an approach that reframes and brings about a cultural shift in the perception of our relationship with nature.

Our laws - based on outdated mechanistic paradigms - are designed to support economic policies which are coupled with the destruction of nature. These laws only manage the worst externalities of business as usual, rather than addressing root causes. At best, they can only slow the rate of degradation - but they cannot stop or reverse it. Sadly, this will continue as long as ecosystems and other species are treated as objects under the law - property - rather than stakeholders in their own right, whose right to life is interdependent with our own.

In response, more and more countries are starting to take a new, holistic approach. Nature's rights have already been enshrined in constitutional, national and local laws around the world (e.g. Bolivia, Ecuador, USA, Mexico, New Zealand) and the principles have been affirmed in court cases. Additionally, the UN has a Harmony with Nature Initiative actively promoting this approach. IUCN (the global authority on the status of the natural world and the measures needed to safeguard it) has included rights of nature in its policy and global work plan. It is time for the European Union as a whole to look at why this is urgently needed and how to implement it.

Some of the Key Questions that the Event will Address:

- What are nature's rights and why is it essential to take a rights-based approach now?
- Why is environmental law failing and how can it evolve to meet the challenges of our time?
- How are nature's rights different from other environmental regulations or reform proposals (e.g. law of ecocide)?
- What does the European Citizens Initiative on the Rights of Nature propose?
- How does nature's rights impact society and how can it solve the multiple crises we are facing?
- How can we transition our legal & economic systems so that they enhance rather than undermine the resilience of nature?