



RIGHTS for NATURE

EUROPEAN CITIZENS' INITIATIVE



Lex regen



AURORA





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European Citizens' Initiative

Rights for Nature: Empower Citizens to Represent and Protect Ecosystems

1) Objectives of the European Citizens' Initiative

This European Citizens' Initiative seeks to recognise Rights of Nature in European law via a legal act such as a Directive or a Regulation to strengthen the protection of ecosystems.

Ecosystems across Europe are in crisis despite existing environmental law, demonstrating the need for an integrated legal and governance framework that complements existing protections while addressing their structural fragmentation.

This Initiative firstly seeks to move from treating nature as a property to recognising ecosystems as living entities with intrinsic value and rights such as the rights to exist, to regenerate their vital cycles and to be restored. Ecosystems should also be granted legal personality, similar to companies.

The aim is also to empower citizens and communities to act as stewards and representatives of ecosystems, both to prevent harm and to support protection, restoration and regeneration. These representatives should have legal standing and additional legal measures when defending ecosystems' rights, building on Mar Menor's example in Spain (see details in Annex).

2) Provisions of the Treaties considered as relevant

For the submission (maximum 255 characters): The Commission's competence derives from Article 11(4) TEU and Regulation (EU) 2019/788. Relevant powers arise under Articles 191–193 TFEU regarding protection of the environment and Article 168 TFEU insofar environmental harm affects public health.



To keep for the website : This Initiative is submitted pursuant to Article 11(4) TEU and Regulation (EU) 2019/788, on the grounds that the European Commission has the competence to propose legislative measures in the field of environmental protection.

The actions requested fall within the scope of the Union's powers under Articles 191–193 TFEU, which establish the EU's responsibility to preserve, protect, and improve the environment, ensure the prudent and rational use of natural resources, and promote measures to address global and regional environmental challenges. In particular, Article 192 TFEU provides the legal basis for adopting legislative acts to achieve these objectives. Additional support may be derived from Article 168 TFEU insofar as environmental degradation affects public health.

Taken together, these provisions empower the Commission to propose legislation recognizing and operationalising Rights of Nature as a means to strengthen environmental protection and ecosystem resilience within the European Union.

3) Website of the initiative

Please find hereafter the website specifically created for this initiative : <https://rightsfornature.eu/>

4) Annex: Subject matter, objectives and background

a) Subject matter

We invite the Commission to adopt an EU Directive acknowledging that ecosystems possess intrinsic value and fundamental rights. Ecosystems within the meaning of Article 3(1) of the EU Regulation 2024/1991 on nature restoration and Article 2(2)c of the Directive 2024/1203 should be recognized as legal persons subject of rights. Recognizing these rights would help counteract the accelerating degradation of biodiversity, climate systems, soils, forests, rivers, wetlands, and marine environments across Europe. This approach could first be operationalized by linking it to the Natura 2000 network, with experimentations in areas designated under the Habitats and Birds Directives and then extended to further ecosystems. This would reinforce existing Treaty principles of precaution, prevention and sustainability, and align EU policies with scientific knowledge on planetary boundaries and help ensure that environmental, social and economic decision-making operates within ecological limits.

Furthermore, we demand the introduction of a citizen-based implementation mechanism which mobilizes local knowledge and highlights the congruence between citizens and ecosystems' interests.



b) Objectives

The Initiative's primary objective is to strengthen the EU's existing environmental framework by complementing traditional regulatory tools with a rights-based framework. The growing evidence of biodiversity loss, climate instability, soil degradation, freshwater depletion, and the decline of marine ecosystems demonstrates that existing approaches, though significant, remain insufficient. A rights-based perspective would thus help overcome fragmented sectoral policies.

Furthermore, the Initiative seeks to ensure community participation in the decision-making process, making representation a key aspect. The legislator should establish clear rules for representation of ecosystems as legal persons and introduce procedural safeguards that guarantee the inclusion of diverse stakeholders, including NGOs, citizens, users, and scientists. The Mar Menor experience may serve as an example for plural representation of interests. However, any framework should be adapted to ensure independence by limiting the direct involvement of elected representatives and public authorities within the representation structures.

Additionally, representatives should have access to legal mechanisms that allow them to defend the interests of ecosystems and give Nature an effective voice in decision-making and, where necessary, in court. Therefore, anyone with a legitimate interest or a declared commitment to enforcing the Rights of Nature should be granted legal standing.

c) Background

This Initiative is rooted in a global Rights of Nature movement which has emerged over the past two decades as a response to the global ecological crisis and the perceived limitations of traditional environmental regulation. Around twenty countries worldwide have recognised rights to ecosystems (rivers, forests, glaciers, ...), through their constitution (Ecuador), legislation (New-Zealand), municipal ordinances (USA, Canada, Australia, Brazil) or court decisions (Colombia, India). In 2019, the UN programme Harmony with Nature described Earth Jurisprudence (Rights of Nature being its legal application) as "the fastest growing legal movement of the 21st century".

In Europe, national and local initiatives have also emerged. Spain became the first European country to enact a law in 2022 which recognises the Mar Menor lagoon and its Basin as a subject of rights with a legal personality. The Spanish Constitutional Court ruled on 20 November 2024 that this law aligns with the Constitution, noting in particular that the purpose of this law was to protect, defend, and restore the lagoon's ecosystem, and that the rights of nature were merely an additional instrument within the existing body of environmental protection legislation.

Multiple local initiatives emerge in other European countries, notably in France (Parliament of the Loire river, declaration of rights of the Tavignanu river, ...), in the Netherlands (incorporation of a nature's interests into municipal decisions), in Poland (citizens' initiative to collect nearly 100,000 signatures to recognize rights to the Odra river), in Germany (rights for the Spree river) and in Belgium (rights for the Sambre river).



These international and European developments demonstrate that civil society is calling for a Rights of Nature framework which is increasingly viewed as a necessary step in environmental governance. In this context, the Rights of Nature invite reflection on more democratic forms of governance in which citizens can represent and give voice to the ecosystems recognised as subject of rights.

Consequently, this Initiative aims to build on these precedents and on the EESC's study "Towards an EU Charter of the Fundamental Rights of Nature", and catalyse EU-level legislative action, to meet citizens' demands.

¹ STC 8583-2022



This Initiative is coordinated from Germany by the NGO Rechte der Natur e.V: and brings together national organisations/citizens from fourteen Member States.

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