Including other-than-human voices in governance and decision-making

There is a growing movement encouraging the representation of nature within governance structures. A person within the council, board or trustees will speak for nature, whether that's speaking for the rivers, forests or specific animals.

This idea is a development of Joanna Macy's Council of All Beings, an exercise in which people represent different beings in a council and are encouraged to speak from that being's perspective on a topic.

This idea can give ecosystems or animals rights within human decision-making systems. Nature or an aspect of nature can have legal personhood and can be represented in legal contexts. This is a way of including nature in any planning and policy-making.

Here are some examples of this in practice:

- Councillors in Sussex approved a charter in February 2025 recognising the right of the **River Ouse** to flow, to be free of pollution and to have native biodiversity.
- In Wales, the Future Generations Commissioner ensures that the interests of future generations are considered in policy-making. The office evaluates the long-term impacts of current policies and promotes sustainable development practices aimed at safeguarding both human and environmental health.
- In Ecuador, the 2008 constitution was the first in the world to grant **legal rights to nature**, or **Pacha Mama** (Mother Earth), to exist and regenerate its life cycles. A case in 2022 used these rights to challenge mining concessions that threatened a protected forest.
- The Yurok tribe in the USA declared the **Klamath River** a legal person.
- In 2010, Bolivia passed the **Law of the Rights of Mother Earth**, defining nature as a collective subject of public interest with inherent rights
- In 2017, the New Zealand Parliament passed an act that recognized the **Whanganui River** as a legal person, or **Te Awa Tupua**. The law was the result of a settlement with the local Māori iwi (tribe) and established a co-governance structure with representatives from both the Māori and the government acting as the river's legal guardians.
- The **Snæfellsjökull glacier** was nominated to run in Iceland's 2024 presidential elections as a symbolic way to bring nature's interests into the political conversation.

There are also various organisations working to advance this concept. The **Planetary Democrats** asks for democracy for all.

> All beings and ecosystems on Earth deserve political representation. To solve planetary challenges we propose the implementation of a Planetary Parliament (from Planetary Democrats website)

Animals in Democracy is building a network of partners to strengthen political representation of animals.

Organisms Democracy and **Embassy of the North Sea** create immersive experiences, inviting people to engage with nature directly through interactive art and role play, from microorganisms to ecosystems, helping them view the world through new, and sometimes surprising lenses. These encounters encourage participants to step into the perspectives of non-human entities.
