

Nature's Rights Bill 2026

Explanatory Note for Website and Public Briefing

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Purpose of this note

This note explains the Nature's Rights Bill 2026 in clear terms for policymakers, councils, civil society partners, legal and environmental practitioners, funders, journalists and members of the public. It is not an official Parliamentary Explanatory Note. It is a public-facing document prepared by Nature's Rights to explain the Bill and the Integrated Rights Framework it translates into legislative form. It distinguishes the Bill as introduced from amendments proposed by Nature's Rights for Committee stage, which remain proposals unless agreed by Parliament.

Authorship, provenance and collaboration

The Nature's Rights Bill 2026 was conceived, developed and drafted by Mumta Ito, Founder of Nature's Rights, to give legislative effect to the Integrated Rights Framework she developed. The Bill has been strengthened through feedback from lawyers, councillors, Rights of Nature advocates, river and woodland protection groups, scholars and other stakeholders. Nature's Rights acts as organisational steward of the Bill and Framework, working collaboratively with parliamentary sponsors and wider partners. The Integrated Rights Framework and diagram are © Mumta Ito 2020 and reproduced by Nature's Rights with permission. All rights reserved.

The Integrated Rights Framework at a glance

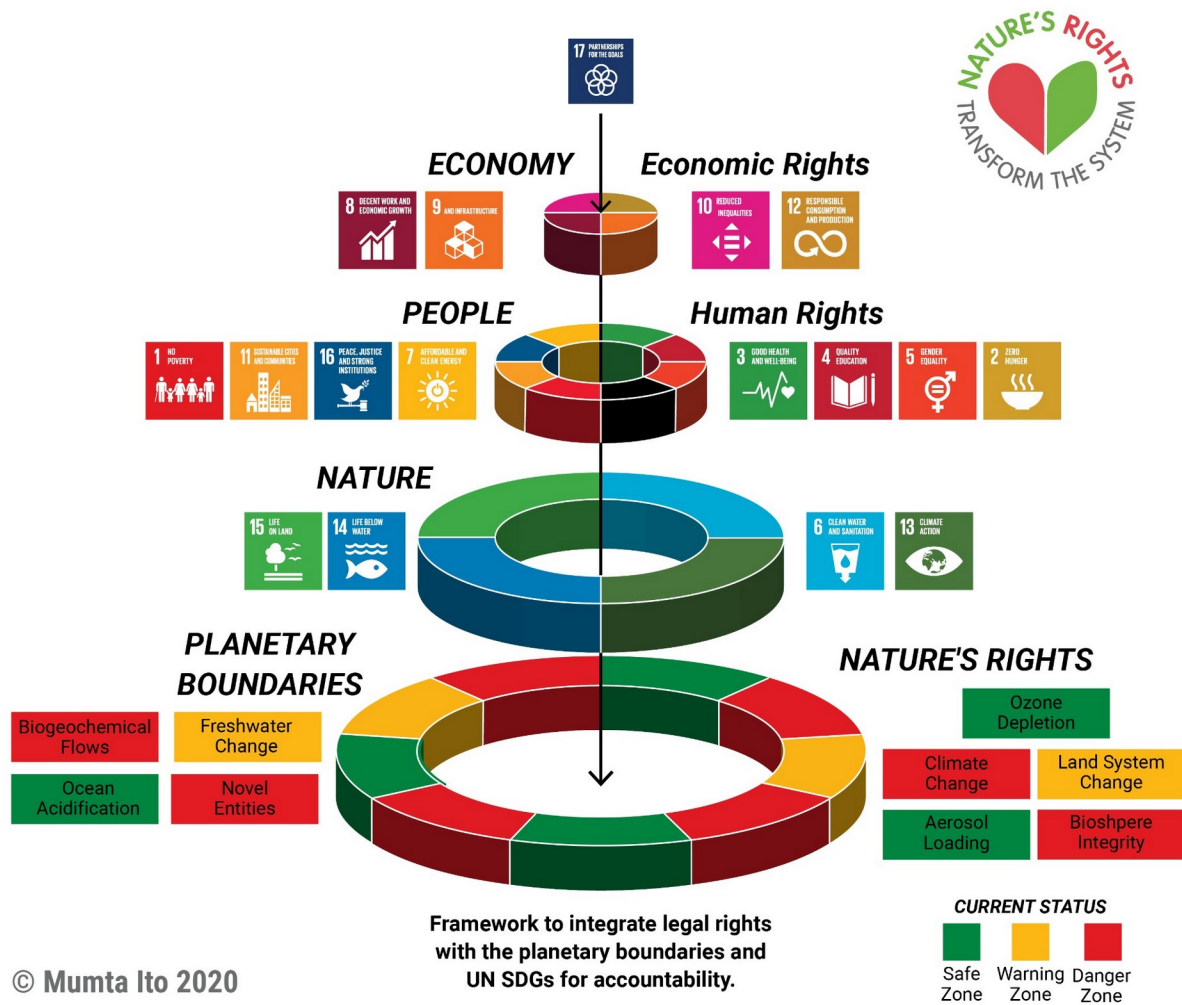


Figure 1. Integrated Rights Framework diagram © Mumta Ito 2020. Reproduced by Nature's Rights with permission. All rights reserved. The Integrated Rights Framework was developed by Mumta Ito and is translated into legislative form through the Nature's Rights Bill.

Summary in one page

The problem	The legal shift	The practical effect
The legal system largely treats Nature as property, resource or externality. This means ecological foundations can be traded off against economic claims even where human wellbeing ultimately depends on them.	The Bill recognises Nature as a legal subject and gives effect to the Integrated Rights Framework: Nature's rights are foundational; human rights are protected within ecological conditions; economic, corporate and property rights operate compatibly with the ecological and human foundations on which they depend.	Public authorities, regulators, UK entities, financial actors and decision-makers would need to align law, policy, permitting, finance and governance with ecological integrity, safe ecological limits, restoration and regeneration.

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1. What the Bill is designed to do

The Nature's Rights Bill 2026 is a framework Bill. Its purpose is not simply to add another environmental policy, but to change the legal architecture within which decisions affecting Nature are made.

The Bill would recognise Nature as a legal subject and rights-bearing entity; establish rights and duties in respect of Nature; and give legislative form to the Integrated Rights Framework. It then creates an implementation architecture so that the new rights and duties can be integrated across law, policy, public administration, permitting, planning, economic decision-making, finance, procurement, reporting and dispute resolution.

The Bill is deliberately designed to be systemic. It is not limited to individual pollution incidents or isolated protected sites. It addresses the underlying hierarchy of rights and decision-making rules that currently allow ecological foundations to be treated as negotiable.

2. Why the Bill is needed

The UK already has environmental laws, regulators, targets and permitting systems. Many of these are important and would continue to matter. The problem is that the existing legal system still largely treats Nature as an object of regulation rather than as a rights-bearing subject. Nature is commonly framed as property, resource, amenity, impact receptor or externality.

That creates a structural imbalance. Property rights, corporate rights, commercial rights and investment expectations are usually legally powerful, direct and enforceable. Nature's interests are often protected indirectly, through administrative permissions, mitigation conditions, discretionary policy goals or after-the-event enforcement. When ecological integrity collides with entrenched economic and property interests, the default system too often permits degradation as an acceptable trade-off.

The Bill responds to this by shifting the legal default upstream. It establishes Nature as a rights-bearing subject and sets the rights of Nature as foundational to human life, society and economic activity. This is intended to prevent avoidable harm, guide regenerative decisions, reduce conflict, and align governance with the real dependency of people and economies on living systems.

3. The Integrated Rights Framework

The Integrated Rights Framework is the core architecture translated by the Bill into law. It was developed by Mumta Ito, Founder of Nature's Rights, to address a central weakness in many rights-based environmental approaches: recognition alone is not enough if Nature's rights are then placed horizontally against more powerful economic, corporate and property claims.

The Framework therefore does two linked things. First, it recognises Nature as a rights-bearing subject. Secondly, it clarifies the relationship between Nature's rights, human rights and economic rights based on systemic dependency: no Nature, no people; no people, no economy. The foundational layer supports the other rights rather than dominating them.

Under the Framework:

- Nature's rights are foundational, because ecological integrity and safe ecological limits are the conditions for life.
- Human rights are protected and fulfilled within the ecological conditions necessary for life.
- Economic, corporate and property rights are exercised in ways that support rather than undermine the rights of Nature and human rights.
- The SDGs and successor sustainable-development frameworks are interpreted consistently with Nature's rights, informed by planetary and Earth-system boundaries and relevant ecological evidence.
- Decision-makers must seek compatible, mutually supportive outcomes through alternatives, redesign, safeguards, restoration and regeneration rather than automatically treating rights as competing claims.

This is why the Bill is not an anti-human or anti-economic measure. It is a reorientation of economy and governance towards the conditions that make human wellbeing and prosperity possible.

4. Main legal effects of the Bill

Recognition of Nature as a legal subject

The Bill recognises Nature as a legal subject and rights-bearing entity. This means that Nature's rights can be represented and enforced in legal and administrative processes. The rights vest in Nature as an interconnected living whole, but they may be asserted in relation to particular ecosystems, habitats, species communities, rivers, woodlands, wetlands, landscapes, seascapes, soils, waters or other natural systems where the harm or risk is specific.

Rights of Nature

The Bill recognises rights including Nature's right to exist, persist, adapt and evolve; to maintain and regenerate ecological integrity, resilience and adaptive capacity; to restoration where harm has occurred; to be free from pollution and degradation threatening ecological integrity; to maintain natural cycles and processes, connectivity, diversity and abundance; and to flourish within safe ecological limits.

Duty of Care

The Bill establishes a Duty of Care towards Nature. Public authorities, UK entities and other persons within the scope of the Act must take reasonable and proportionate steps to protect and maintain Nature, restore ecological integrity where harm has occurred, prevent and reduce harm, remedy ecological damage contributed to by their activities, support resilience, adaptation and regeneration, and act consistently with the Integrated Rights Framework.

Rights Impact Assessments

The Bill introduces Rights Impact Assessments for proposals that may materially affect Nature. An RIA is a statutory compatibility assessment undertaken early enough for meaningful alternatives and redesign to remain available. It can be integrated with existing environmental assessments, but must address Nature’s rights, the Duty of Care, the Framework, ecological integrity, safe ecological limits, cumulative and systemic effects, alternatives, mitigation, restoration and regeneration.

5. How the Bill is structured

Part	What it does
Part 1 - Preliminary	Sets out the short title, purpose, extent, commencement, Crown application and definitions.
Part 2 - Recognition of Nature and the Integrated Rights Framework	Recognises Nature as a legal subject, establishes the rights of Nature, the Integrated Rights Framework, the Duty of Care and rules for interpreting rights and conflicts.
Part 3 - Integration into law, policy and decision-making	Requires integration into law, policy, public administration, permitting, financial systems, reporting, phased implementation, incentives and legislative alignment.
Part 4 - Ecological governance and implementation	Establishes the Nature Guardianship Council, Bioregional Councils, Nature Designated Entities, Bioregional Implementation Plans, participation, pilots, guidance, education and monitoring.
Part 5 - Dispute resolution, Tribunal and enforcement	Prioritises non-adversarial resolution, establishes the Nature's Rights Tribunal, standing, remedies, enforcement notices, offences, access to justice, immunity of Nature and appeals.
Part 6 - Final provisions	Deals with regulations, parliamentary procedure, devolution, international application, consequential provisions, relationship with other protections, review, finance and commencement.
Schedules	Provide detail on the Integrated Rights Framework, priority legislative and policy alignment, guidance and standards, and enforcement measures and restorative remedies.

6. Governance and implementation architecture

Nature Guardianship Council

The Nature Guardianship Council is designed as an expert body for technical advice, ecological methodologies, scientific assessment, monitoring, coordination and implementation support. It does not replace existing regulators. Its functions include preparing technical advice and draft statutory guidance, supporting public authorities and UK entities, monitoring implementation, advising regulators, supporting Rights Impact Assessment methodologies and non-adversarial resolution, referring matters to the Tribunal, maintaining registers, and facilitating participation and pilots. Statutory guidance with legal effect would be issued by the Secretary of State, within defined limits and subject to Parliamentary approval.

Existing regulators and public authorities

Existing public authorities and regulators continue to exercise their existing statutory functions. However, they must do so, so far as compatible with their mandates, consistently with the Rights and Duties and the Integrated Rights Framework. This allows the Bill to reorient the existing system without pretending that a new body can or should replace the whole regulatory state.

Bioregional Councils

Bioregional Councils support local and regional implementation. They can monitor ecological conditions, support public participation, receive concerns, facilitate mediation and non-adversarial resolution, advise authorities and communities, assist with Rights Impact Assessments, support Bioregional Implementation Plans and refer serious or unresolved matters to the Nature Guardianship Council or Tribunal. They are expressly not courts and do not determine civil or criminal liability.

7. Nature Designated Entities

The Bill creates a process for recognising particular natural features, ecosystems, habitats, species communities or natural systems as Nature Designated Entities. This mechanism is designed to help represent, protect, restore or regenerate the rights of Nature in relation to specific places or systems, such as rivers, wetlands, ancient woodlands, chalk streams, peatlands, coastal systems or other ecosystems of special ecological importance.

The provision includes safeguards to prevent misunderstanding. Designation does not transfer ownership of land, water, natural resources or other property; does not create a right of public access; does not create a new protected area status; does not prevent lawful use of land or property where compatible with the Rights and Duties; and does not authorise the Nature Guardianship Council, a Bioregional Council or any other person to take possession or control of land, water or other property.

This allows the Bill to respond to river-rights and woodland-rights advocacy without creating a parallel land acquisition or protected areas regime. It is a representation and restoration mechanism, not a land grab.

8. Relationship with existing environmental law and permits

A central purpose of the Bill is to strengthen, not weaken, existing environmental law. The Bill preserves stronger protections under other enactments or rules of law, while requiring existing legal frameworks to be read and applied consistently with the Rights and Duties and the Integrated Rights Framework where possible.

The Bill also closes a key loophole: a permit, licence, consent, approval, authorisation or exemption granted under another enactment does not of itself constitute compliance with the Rights and Duties. Future permitting decisions must be compatible, so far as relevant and proportionate, with the Rights and Duties,

the Integrated Rights Framework, the Duty of Care, ecological integrity and safe ecological limits. Existing permits would be reviewed and aligned over time through the priority legislative and policy alignment programme, with substantive powers and safeguards specified in the Bill.

This is important because the existing environmental permit system can authorise activities that still degrade Nature. The Bill therefore makes clear that administrative permission under existing law cannot be used as a shield against serious, irreversible, cumulative or systemic harm to Nature.

9. Economy, finance and supply chains

The Bill expressly includes economic and financial systems because the Integrated Rights Framework is concerned with the underlying operating system of society, not only with environmental regulation in a narrow sense. Financial activity, capital allocation, lending, underwriting, investment, insurance, pensions, procurement, subsidies, taxation and public spending can all enable or prevent ecological harm.

The Bill therefore requires relevant public authorities and UK entities to integrate the Rights and Duties into decision-making, including finance, investment, insurance, pensions, fiduciary decision-making, reporting, risk management and transition planning. This does not attempt to rewrite all financial regulation at once. Instead, it establishes the legal direction of travel and provides for guidance, reporting, incentives and legislative alignment.

The Bill also preserves global UK entity and supply-chain reach. UK entities must take reasonable and proportionate steps in relation to overseas subsidiaries, contractors, supply chains, investments, lending, underwriting, insurance, procurement and other relationships where there is material direction, control or influence from the UK.

10. Devolution and international application

Devolution

The Bill has UK-wide ambition, while respecting devolution. It extends to England and Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland. Under the proposed Committee-stage amendments, the Secretary of State must seek the relevant devolved administration's consent before making regulations within devolved competence. Where consent is not given within 60 days, proceeding would require specified necessity and proportionality safeguards and an explanation to Parliament. Devolved institutions remain free to provide stronger protections for Nature.

International and overseas application

The Bill does not purport to change the law of other countries. For overseas activities materially directed, controlled or influenced by UK entities, the proposed amendments clarify a duty of reasonable and proportionate due diligence, not strict liability for others' conduct. International environmental, climate, biodiversity and human-rights obligations are minimum protections; trade and investment obligations are not treated as ecological minimum standards. The Bill does not purport unilaterally to alter the UK's international obligations.

11. Safeguards: what the Bill does not do

The Bill contains a number of safeguards to address predictable concerns.

- It does not transfer ownership of land, water or natural resources to Nature, the Nature Guardianship Council or Bioregional Councils.
- It does not create a general right of public access to private land or water.
- It does not make Nature liable for natural processes such as flooding, erosion, drought, fire, storm, disease, species movement or ecological succession.

- It does not abolish existing regulators or replace existing public authorities unless regulations expressly provide otherwise.
- It does not make every infringement a criminal offence. Proposed amendments confine offences to knowing non-compliance with enforcement measures, false or misleading required information, intentional concealment and obstruction.
- It does not create a general prior-authorisation requirement solely because the Framework applies; activities requiring no permit nevertheless remain subject to the applicable rights and duties.
- It does not prevent compatible lawful use of land, property or corporate assets or economic activity.
- It does not create unlimited publicly funded legal representation or require UK entities to breach binding overseas law.

12. What this means for councils, river groups, woodland groups and communities

The Bill gives local and community energy a national legal pathway. Councils, river groups, woodland groups and community bodies could use the framework to support local implementation, public participation, Rights Impact Assessments, Nature Designated Entity applications, Bioregional Implementation Plans, non-adversarial dispute resolution and model local governance measures.

For river-rights and woodland-rights advocates, the Bill avoids the weakness of purely symbolic local declarations by creating a route to national legal recognition and representation. At the same time, it avoids fragmenting Nature's rights into disconnected local claims by keeping the rights vested in Nature as an interconnected living whole.

For councils, the Bill supports local and bioregional implementation without assuming that every council can or should create a legally enforceable rights regime on its own. It provides an architecture for national recognition, local participation, regulatory alignment and implementation through existing and new governance channels.

13. Implementation pathway

The Bill is drafted for phased implementation. Some provisions would come into force immediately, while others would commence by regulations and implementation timetables. This is important because the Bill is systemic: it affects law, regulation, reporting, finance, permitting, planning, governance and enforcement. A phased approach allows the system to transition while still requiring progress towards full and effective implementation.

Key implementation tools include the Nature Guardianship Council, technical advice, methodologies and statutory guidance, Rights Impact Assessments, reporting thresholds, regenerative transition support, Bioregional Implementation Plans, pilots, education and capacity-building, Tribunal remedies and the priority legislative and policy alignment programme.

This approach is intended to make the Bill both ambitious and implementable: clear enough to change the legal direction of travel, but practical enough to be developed through guidance, pilots, reporting, regulations and staged alignment of existing law.

14. Authorship, provenance and collaboration

The Nature's Rights Bill 2026 was conceived, developed and drafted by Mumta Ito, Founder of Nature's Rights, to give legislative effect to the Integrated Rights Framework she developed. The Bill has been refined through dialogue and feedback from lawyers, councillors, Rights of Nature advocates, river and woodland protection groups, scholars, ecological governance practitioners and other stakeholders. Their contributions have helped strengthen the drafting, clarify implementation pathways and ensure the Bill responds to practical concerns while remaining faithful to its underlying legal architecture.

Nature's Rights acts as the organisational steward of the Bill and the Integrated Rights Framework, working with parliamentary sponsors, civil society partners, communities and wider movement actors to advance credible legal recognition and implementation of Nature's rights.

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Key messages for public communication

Nature as subject, not object: The Bill recognises Nature as a legal subject with rights that can be represented and enforced.

Foundations first: Nature's rights support human rights and economic rights because all depend on functioning ecological systems. This expresses dependency and support, not an automatic trump rule.

Not anti-development: The Bill supports human wellbeing and economic activity where they are compatible with ecological integrity and regeneration.

Upstream prevention: The Bill aims to prevent harm and conflict before they become litigation, collapse or crisis.

Regeneration by design: The Bill aligns law, governance, finance and decision-making with restoration and regeneration.