

Nature's Rights Bill Briefing: A Governance Response to the UK's Climate, Nature and Food Security Risks

Briefing for Peers and MPs | Committee-stage briefing | Updated October 2026

Summary

The Nature's Rights Bill [HL], introduced by Baroness Bennett on 1 June 2026, completed Second Reading on 3 July. Committee stage is the next parliamentary stage; a date has not yet been announced. The published text remains HL Bill 7 as introduced, while Nature's Rights has prepared proposed Committee-stage amendments.

The Bill addresses more than a regulatory gap. Current law largely treats Nature as an object, resource or externality, and separates ecological systems, human rights and economic activity into legal domains that do not reflect their physical interdependence. This foundational architecture can permit, finance and reward activities that cumulatively undermine the living systems upon which people and economies depend.

Recent parliamentary and government-facing evidence has made the issue clearer. The National Emergency Briefing highlighted the implications of climate and nature breakdown for food security, public health, national security and economic stability. The Defra-commissioned nature security assessment recognises ecosystem degradation and collapse as a risk to UK food production, water, health, supply chains and wider security.

The question at Committee stage is how to translate recognition of Nature's rights into a coherent, legally workable transformation of that underlying architecture. Scrutiny should test both the Bill's foundational principles and the proposed implementation safeguards, without reducing it to another environmental regulatory measure.

The case for constructive Committee-stage scrutiny is clear:

The risks are systemic.

The legal gap is foundational.

The Integrated Rights Framework provides a relational legal architecture with practical implementation machinery.

Committee-stage amendments provide an opportunity to strengthen clarity, proportionality and parliamentary accountability.

1. The risk is now recognised as systemic

Climate and nature breakdown are no longer side issues. They are increasingly recognised as risks to the foundations of national life: food, water, public health, infrastructure, supply chains, economic stability and security.

The National Emergency Briefing brought together leaders from politics, business, science and civil society to examine the escalating risks posed by climate change and nature loss. The related Early Day Motion recognises that food security, public health and national security are increasingly compromised by climate-related impacts, including supply shocks, economic instability and heightened global tensions. It calls for emergency legislation, investment and public engagement commensurate with the scale and urgency of the crisis.

The Defra-commissioned nature security assessment reaches a similar conclusion from a national security perspective. It examines how global biodiversity loss and ecosystem collapse could affect the UK's resilience, security and prosperity. It recognises that ecosystem degradation and collapse can disrupt food, water, health and supply chains, and contribute to wider geopolitical instability.

This matters because the UK depends on functioning ecosystems both domestically and globally. Soil health, pollination, freshwater systems, stable weather patterns, marine ecosystems, forests and resilient supply chains are not peripheral environmental concerns. They are foundational conditions for public wellbeing, food security and economic stability.

The political implication is clear: Parliament now needs to examine whether existing legal frameworks are capable of responding to risks of this scale and character.

2. The governance gap: why current legal frameworks are not enough

The “tipping points governance gap” is the mismatch between the world we are entering and the legal system we are still using.

Ecological risk is becoming increasingly non-linear, cumulative and cascading. Once certain thresholds are crossed, damage may accelerate or become difficult to reverse. Failure in one system — soil, water, pollination, forests, oceans, climate regulation — can cascade into food, health, infrastructure, migration, insurance, public finance and security risks.

Yet much of our current legal and policy architecture is still built for incremental problems. It assumes environmental harm can be managed through permits, mitigation, compensation,

consultation and case-by-case balancing. In practice, Nature is still largely treated as property, resource or externality. Ecological decline can often be authorised as an acceptable trade-off where other interests are deemed more immediate.

This is not simply an enforcement problem. Better enforcement is necessary, but insufficient. The deeper problem lies in the legal constructs that determine what is owned, permitted, financed, rewarded and treated as expendable. Law does not yet adequately reflect the systemic reality that human life, rights, society and the economy depend on functioning Nature.

Existing frameworks each have value, but they remain limited:

- Environmental regulation can reduce specific harms, but it often permits degradation where conditions are met.
- Planning and development frameworks often balance Nature against economic or infrastructure goals rather than recognising Nature as the foundation that makes those goals possible.
- Litigation is usually case-by-case and downstream, after harm is threatened or has occurred.
- Voluntary ESG and nature-risk disclosure can reveal dependency and exposure, but do not by themselves change legal duties or decision rules.
- Siloed recognition of a particular river, species, site or ecosystem may be valuable, but cannot by itself address system-wide ecological risk unless linked to wider governance architecture.

The gap is therefore not a lack of concern for Nature. It is the absence of a foundational legal relationship that brings Nature, people and the economy into one coherent system and translates that relationship into rights, duties and practical rules across society.

3. The Nature's Rights Bill: what it seeks to change

The Nature's Rights Bill responds by recognising Nature as a legal subject with inherent rights and translating the Integrated Rights Framework (IRF) into enforceable, cross-sectoral law. It is the first national legislative prototype of a new foundational rights architecture, not simply a new environmental policy.

It recognises rights to exist, persist and evolve, maintain ecological integrity and natural processes, and recover from harm, alongside reasonable and proportionate duties of care. Proposed amendments strengthen ecological adaptation, resilience, connectivity and protection against serious, cumulative and systemic harm, while recognising that living ecosystems naturally change.

The IRF brings Nature's rights, human rights and economic, corporate and property rights into an integrated relationship based on systemic dependency rather than an adversarial ranking of competing claims:

Nature is the living foundation.

Human societies exist within Nature.

Economies exist within society.

This is a relationship of support, not domination. Nature's rights are foundational because they protect the conditions on which human rights and economic activity depend; they do not automatically override every other right. Decision-makers should first seek compatibility through redesign, alternatives, safeguards, restoration and regeneration, while protecting against serious ecological harm.

The Bill supplies the implementation machinery for this legal shift: duties of care, compatibility rules, Rights Impact Assessments, finance and investment alignment, reporting, bioregional governance, participation, non-adversarial resolution, remedies and phased transition. The aim is to move action upstream, so law, investment and development increasingly maintain and regenerate the conditions for human and economic flourishing.

In practical terms, the Bill invites Parliament to examine how UK law can:

- recognise Nature as a legal subject, not merely property or resource;
- create duties to prevent ecological degradation and support restoration;
- align planning, development, finance and public decisions with ecological integrity, using planetary and Earth-system boundaries as relevant scientific evidence rather than mechanically imposed local quotas;
- provide clearer accountability where decisions undermine Nature's ability to sustain life;
- move beyond siloed environmental protection towards an integrated, regenerative legal operating system.

4. Why this matters for food security, public health and economic resilience

Food security depends on healthy soils, pollinators, water systems, stable weather, biodiversity and resilient ecosystems. Public health depends on clean air, clean water, liveable temperatures, disease regulation, access to green space and stable supply chains. Economic resilience depends on the natural systems that underpin agriculture, infrastructure, insurance, finance, trade and public services.

When Nature is degraded, these risks do not stay in an “environmental” box. They become household costs, health pressures, food price shocks, infrastructure failures, insurance losses, supply chain disruptions and public finance challenges.

The Bill is therefore not simply an environmental or resilience measure. By changing the legal starting point for planning, finance, business, infrastructure and government, it aims to prevent damaging decisions upstream and redirect institutions and investment towards maintaining and regenerating the foundations of life.

The Bill does not ask Parliament to choose Nature over people or the economy. It asks Parliament to recognise that people and the economy depend on Nature — and that law should be organised accordingly.

5. Committee-stage priorities and proposed safeguards

Second Reading was completed on 3 July 2026. Committee stage is the opportunity to scrutinise how the Bill’s foundational principles will operate in law and to consider amendments that strengthen legal certainty, proportionality, accountability and implementation.

Nature’s Rights’ proposed Committee-stage amendments clarify that Nature’s foundational position is relational, not an automatic trump rule; require compatibility and reasonable redesign before genuine conflict is determined; and establish a proportionate Rights Impact Assessment process without exempting materially harmful unlicensed activities.

Following the House of Lords Delegated Powers and Regulatory Reform Committee’s September report, the proposed amendments put substantive permit-alignment rules on the face of the Bill, constrain delegated powers, distinguish expert technical advice from Parliament-approved statutory guidance, clarify overseas due diligence, and limit penalties and criminal liability. University of York scientific review has also informed refinements on dynamic ecosystems, ecological evidence, planetary boundaries and community participation.

The Committee-stage case can be expressed as follows:

- The evidence now shows that ecological breakdown is a systemic risk.
- Existing frameworks are not reversing decline at the scale or pace required.
- The Bill offers a coherent legal and governance response.
- The proposed amendments provide a serious basis for detailed scrutiny, constitutional safeguards and workable implementation.

These are proposed changes, not enacted provisions. The publicly available Bill remains HL Bill 7 as introduced until Parliament agrees amendments. Constructive parliamentary scrutiny should preserve the IRF’s foundational change while ensuring the legal machinery is clear, proportionate and accountable.

6. Suggested lines for Committee-stage debate

“Climate and nature breakdown are no longer peripheral environmental concerns. They are risks to food security, public health, economic stability and national security. The question before us is whether our legal frameworks are capable of responding at that scale.”

“The Nature’s Rights Bill is not merely another environmental measure. It proposes to change the legal relationship between Nature, people and the economy, reflecting the scientific reality that human life and economic prosperity depend upon functioning living systems.”

“Current frameworks can regulate some harms, but they still often permit ecological decline as an acceptable trade-off. That is the governance gap this Bill seeks to address.”

“Nature’s foundational position is not a rule that Nature automatically wins every dispute. The proposed amendments establish compatibility, redesign and practical solutions as the starting point, while protecting the ecological conditions upon which all rights depend.”

“The radical position is not to update the law. The radical position is to continue governing as if ecological systems are peripheral when the evidence increasingly shows they are foundational to food security, public health and national resilience.”

7. Immediate ask

We ask Peers and MPs to support rigorous, constructive Committee-stage scrutiny of the Nature’s Rights Bill, engage with the proposed amendments, and help build a workable cross-party pathway for its foundational legal principles and implementation architecture.

The Bill is a timely and serious response to a governance challenge that Parliament can no longer afford to treat as marginal.

Source anchors for further reference

- [Early Day Motion 93: National Emergency Briefing, tabled 14 May 2026.](#)
- [Defra / UK Government: Nature security assessment on global biodiversity loss, ecosystem collapse and national security.](#)
- [Nature’s Rights Bill \[HL\], HL Bill 7 as introduced \(1 June 2026\); Second Reading completed 3 July 2026; Committee stage pending.](#)

- [Nature's Rights: Integrated Rights Framework: September 2026 proposed Committee-stage amendments; House of Lords Delegated Powers and Regulatory Reform Committee Eighth Report \(4 September 2026\); University of York scientific review.](#)