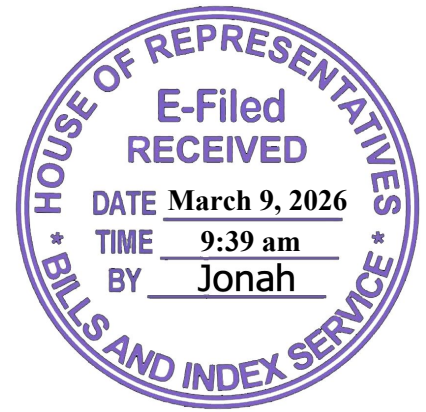


Republic of the Philippines
HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES
Quezon City, Metro Manila

TWENTIETH CONGRESS
First Regular Session

HOUSE BILL NO. **8352**



Introduced by Representative LEILA M. DE LIMA

AN ACT
TO RECOGNIZE AND PROTECT THE RIGHTS OF NATURE
IN THE PHILIPPINES

EXPLANATORY NOTE

Under the Stockholm Declaration of 1972, it was announced that “safeguarding the *homo sapiens*” is the primary objective of environmental laws without much “emphasis on the protection of other components of the environment.” Protecting nature for the benefit of mankind (anthropocentric) was the original motivating force behind environmental laws.¹

In recent times, there has been an emerging shift in paradigm where several countries have now considered that the protection of nature is actually for the benefit of nature itself (eco-centric). Ecuador recognizes the rights of nature in its constitution (2008). New Zealand grants legal personhood to the Whanganui River and Te Urewera forest. Bolivia’s Law of Mother Earth (2012) also grants legal rights. In these jurisdictions, nature can be and has been granted legal personality, a concept where ecosystems like rivers, forests, and mountains are recognized as legal subjects with rights rather than treated as mere property.²

These “rights of nature” typically include the right of a natural ecosystem, or a part thereof, to exist, persist, maintain, and regenerate its vital cycles. Since ecosystems cannot speak, legal frameworks appoint human guardians (often indigenous groups or government agencies) to represent the entity’s interests. This

¹ The 1972 UN Conference on Human Environment contained 109 recommendations comprising ambitious action plans relating to natural resources, human settlement, human health, ecosystem, environment and development and many other matters. At the end of the conference, 109 participating States agreed and declared 26 Principles known as the Magna Carta on Human Environment.

² Van Zeebroeck, S. (2022). Nature Rights: What Countries Grant Legal Personhood Status to Nature and Why?. Retrieved from <https://earth.org/nature-rights/>

shift in legal approach transforms environmental law from a human-centered mindset to one that protects ecosystems intrinsically, allowing them to be represented in court to stop further damage, pollution and destruction. This novel framework centered on recognizing nature as a distinct entity with legal personality can enable proactive protection against environmental degradation, while mitigating the effects of climate change.³

Article II, Section 16 of the 1987 Constitution provides that, “[t]he State shall protect and advance the right of the people to a balanced and healthful ecology in accord with the rhythm and harmony of nature.” This Rights of Nature bill seeks to address the shortcomings in the country’s current response to environmental degradation and climate crisis by redefining the problem and reframing the response.

The bill seeks to provide a legal personality to natural ecosystems and processes, recognizing their inherent and inalienable rights to exist, flourish, and regenerate. Through this bill, any person shall have the right to defend, protect, and enforce the rights bestowed upon natural ecosystems and processes recognized by this bill.

This bill aims to reorient the framework within which human beings interact with nature. Instead of the previously utilitarian perspective of seeing nature as property to be used, exploited, and preserved for the benefit of humans, this bill seeks to introduce a new worldview that recognizes the inherent rights of nature, thus affecting the subsequent laws and interactions of humans with nature.

In the 20th Congress, similar bills were filed by Senator Risa Hontiveros and Representatives Arnan Panaligan, Ferdinand Martin Romualdez, Yedda Romualdez, Andrew Romualdez, Jude Acidre, Percival Cendaña, Jose Manuel Diokno, Dadah Ismula, and Kaka Bag-ao. This bill adopts several provisions from the aforementioned bills. This version was developed in consultation with the Rights of Nature network in the Philippines.

For a genuinely eco-centric Philippines, early approval of this measure is earnestly sought.


LEILA M. DE LIMA

³ Mills, E. (2025). Environmental personhood: what is it and why should nature be given legal status? Retrieved from <https://www.weforum.org/stories/2025/02/environmental-personhood/>.

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Be it enacted by the Senate and House of Representatives of the Philippines in Congress assembled:

1 SECTION. 1. *Short Title.* – This Act shall be known as the “Rights of Nature
2 Act.”
3

4 SEC. 2. *Declaration of Policy.* – It is hereby declared the policy of the State to
5 recognize and protect natural ecosystems and processes, or distinct and identifiable
6 portions thereof, as legal entities possessing certain fundamental and inalienable
7 rights. The State shall provide simple, effective, and expeditious mechanisms for the
8 protection and enforcement of these rights. Such rights shall be founded on the
9 following:
10

- 11 a. Interconnectedness. All creations are bound by a common living source,
12 and all activities in the ecosystem—land, air, water, and sea live and
13 function according to their respective roles to create and sustain the web
14 life—shall at all times be respected.
- 15 b. Harmony. All human activities, within the framework of plurality and
16 diversity, should achieve a dynamic balance with the cycles and processes
17 inherent in Nature.
- 18 c. Collective good. The interests of society shall be fulfilled consistent with
19 the rights of Nature and shall involve all human activities.
- 20 d. Guarantee of the regeneration of Nature. The State, at its various levels,
21 and society, in harmony with the common interest, must ensure the
22 necessary conditions in order that Nature may regenerate, recognizing that
23 ecosystems are limited in their ability to regenerate, and that humans are
24 limited in their ability to undo their actions.

- e. Multiculturalism. The exercise of the rights of Nature requires the recognition, recovery, respect, protection, and dialogue of the diversity of feelings, values, knowledge, skills, practices, skills, transcendence, transformation, science, technology and standards, of all the cultures of the world who seek to live in harmony with nature.
- f. Co-existence of Human Rights and Rights of Nature. All rights guaranteed under the Constitution and international human rights treaties and laws, shall be exercised in harmony and consistent with the rights of Nature.
- g. Promotion of ecologically-sound innovation. The promotion of ecologically-sound innovation shall be in line with the rights of Nature and shall be actively pursued by the State.
- h. Indispensable role of the IPs/ICCs. The State recognizes the indispensable role of the indigenous peoples/indigenous cultural communities in the protection and promotion of the rights of Nature.

SEC. 3. *Definition of Terms.* – As used in this Act, the following terms are defined as follows:

- a. *Nature* refers to the physical world, which encompasses all the biotic and abiotic components and their interactions. It also refers to the meanings in which different groups attribute to the physical environment to make sense of the world.
- b. *Natural Ecosystems* refer to the complex and dynamic communities of plants, animals, microorganisms, species, and other beings and their environment, both living and non-living, where human communities and the rest of nature interact as a functional unit under the influence of climatic, physiographic, and geological factors, as well as production practices, Filipino cultural diversity, and the worldviews of nations and indigenous peoples/indigenous cultural communities.
- c. *Ecological renewal and restoration* refer to the process that will enable the recovery of an ecosystem previously damaged by natural or anthropogenic causes.
- d. *Ecological debt* refers to what a country incurs when its ecological footprint exceeds its biocapacity. This means that the countries make use of resources of other countries to fulfill their consumption needs.
- e. *Indigenous Peoples/Indigenous Cultural Communities* refer to the definition provided in Republic Act No. 8371, otherwise known as the “*The Indigenous Peoples Rights Act of 1997.*”

1 SEC. 4. *The Fundamental Rights of Nature.* – Natural ecosystems shall have
2 the right to exist; to the maintenance of the vital cycles, functions, and processes that
3 ensure their continued sustainability and well-being; to the conditions necessary for
4 their ecological renewal and restoration; and to adequate and effective representation
5 vis-à-vis the protection and enforcement of these rights. These rights shall be in
6 addition to, and shall not impair or limit, any other right or remedy available under
7 existing laws, administrative regulations, or jurisprudence. A violation of any existing
8 environmental law or regulation shall be deemed a *prima facie* violation of these rights.
9

10 The State likewise recognizes that there are limits on the ability of natural
11 ecosystems and processes to regenerate as well as on the ability of humanity to undo
12 and reverse any damage it has caused to the environment. Thus, all development that
13 affects or modifies natural ecosystems and processes must guarantee and uphold the
14 rights secured in this Act, be sustainable, ensure the maintenance of critical
15 ecosystem services, and respect intra- and intergenerational equity.
16

17 SEC. 5. *Legal Personality of Natural Ecosystems and Processes.* – The legal
18 personality of natural ecosystems and processes, including all of their living and non-
19 living elements, as well as any distinct and identifiable portions, aggregations, or
20 components thereof, shall be recognized under the law. In any action for the protection
21 or enforcement of the rights recognized herein, the natural ecosystem or process
22 involved shall be considered the real party-in-interest. Only natural ecosystems as
23 defined in this Act, including those under Section 13, shall be deemed to have legal
24 personality and entitled to protection under this Act. Likewise, the rights of nature
25 secured in this Act shall not be interpreted to confer liabilities, duties, obligations, or
26 responsibilities on nature.
27

28 SEC. 6. *Obligations of the Government.* – The Government shall take all
29 necessary actions to fully protect and enforce the rights recognized by this Act,
30 including, but not limited to, the following:
31

- 32 a. Develop and implement policies and regulations to guarantee and
33 uphold the rights recognized in this Act, including, but not limited to,
34 decision-making criteria for all government actions and authorized
35 activities that will guarantee and uphold these rights, including
36 prevention of harm to natural ecosystems and processes before harm
37 happens, early warning systems to ensure any potential or ongoing harm
38 is stopped, robust enforcement of these rights in courts of appropriate
39 jurisdiction, protection and restoration of natural ecosystems and
40 processes, and the exercise of precautionary measures to prevent
41 human activity from causing the extinction of living populations, the
42 alteration of the cycles and processes that ensure life, and the
43 destruction of livelihoods and cultural systems that are intertwined with
44 natural ecosystems and processes;

- b. Promote balanced forms of production and patterns of consumption that, while satisfying the needs of the Filipino people, safeguard the regenerative capacity and integrity of natural ecosystems and processes;
- c. Protect natural ecosystems and processes from the exploitation of their components, the commodification of living systems or the processes that support them, and the structural causes and effects of global climate change;
- d. Ensure long-term energy sovereignty, increased efficiency, and the gradual incorporation of clean and renewable alternative sources into the energy matrix;
- e. Demand international recognition of ecological debt through the financing and transfer of clean technology compatible with the rights recognized in this Act;
- f. Promote peace and the elimination of all weapons of mass destruction; and
- g. Promote the recognition of the rights of natural ecosystems and processes in multilateral, regional, and bilateral international relations.

SEC. 7. *Obligations of Juridical Persons.* – All juridical persons shall take all necessary actions to protect and enforce the rights recognized by this law including, but not limited to, the following:

- a. Embed the Right of Nature policy in their by-laws and organizational processes upon submission of their application for registration to the Securities and Exchange Commission (SEC);
- b. Undertake regular reporting to the Department of Environment and Natural Resources (DENR) of their impacts on specific ecosystems where they are conducting their business operations;
- c. Conduct environmental and human rights assessment prior to conducting their operations or whenever there is significant change in their operations such as merger or closure of business, which demonstrate that their activities are not violating the rights recognized in this Act or harming nature: *Provided*, That such assessment – demonstrating that the Rights of Nature are not being violated – shall be a prerequisite for the issuance of the Environmental Compliance Certificate (ECC) by the DENR.

SEC. 8. *Representation and Standing.* – Any Philippine resident may file an action to enforce the rights or obligations recognized under this Act. Upon the filing of any such action, the Court shall issue an order which shall contain a brief description of the cause of action and the reliefs prayed for, requiring all interested parties to manifest their interest to intervene in the case within thirty (30) days from notice thereof.

1 SEC. 9. *Reliefs*. – If warranted, the court shall issue a judgment in favor of the
2 natural process or ecosystem on whose behalf an action for the protection and
3 enforcement of the rights recognized herein was filed, which shall include measures
4 for its protection, preservation, ecological renewal and restoration, as well as the
5 payment of attorney’s fees, costs of suit, and other litigation expenses. Monetary
6 damages to be awarded shall be the amount necessary to fully rectify or repair the
7 damage done to natural ecosystems and processes by the defendant.

8
9 SEC. 10. *Trust Fund*. – Any monetary award that any court may award in
10 defense of the Rights of Nature shall not accrue to the benefit of the representative
11 but it will be deposited to a Trust Fund: *Provided*, however, That any expenses
12 incurred by the representative shall constitute a lien to the monetary award.

13
14 All monetary awards shall be deposited in the Trust Fund under the
15 administration of the Conservation Committee provided for in this Act, which shall be
16 used to implement the measures for protection, preservation, ecological restoration,
17 or renewal ordered by the court.

18
19 SEC. 11. *Appointment of Conservation Committee*. – To administer the Trust
20 Fund and implement the measures necessary for protection, preservation, or
21 ecological renewal and restoration of the natural ecosystem or process on whose
22 behalf an action pursuant to this Act was filed, the court shall appoint a conservation
23 committee from the stakeholders concerned. The court shall give preference to
24 indigenous cultural communities from the same area, people’s organization, non-
25 governmental organization, or any public interest group accredited by or registered
26 with any government agency. Under no circumstances shall a person or entity
27 responsible for a violation of the rights recognized herein be appointed to a
28 conservation committee.

29
30 SEC. 12. *Designation of Courts and Promulgation of Procedural Rules*. – The
31 Supreme Court shall designate the court or courts that will hear and resolve cases
32 brought under this Act and shall promulgate the rules of pleading, practice, and
33 procedure to govern the proceedings brought under this Act.

34
35 SEC. 13. *Strategic Lawsuits against Public Participation*. – A Strategic Lawsuit
36 against Public Participation (SLAPP) is any action filed to harass, vex, or exert undue
37 pressure against any person or legal entity that has taken legal action or made a public
38 communication of any kind in connection with the enforcement or protection of the
39 rights recognized herein or any other environmental law or regulation.

40
41 A person against whom a legal action is filed may assert that the action
42 constitutes SLAPP as an affirmative defense in the same case.
43

1 Upon such assertion, the court shall conduct a special hearing on the SLAPP
2 as an affirmative defense at the earliest possible stage of the proceedings. The
3 hearing shall be summary in nature, and the court shall resolve the SLAPP affirmative
4 defense within thirty (30) days from the conclusion of the summary hearing.

5
6 If the court upholds the SLAPP as an affirmative defense, the action shall be
7 dismissed with prejudice. The court may likewise award attorney's fees, costs of suit,
8 and damages under a counterclaim, if one has been filed.

9
10 If the court rejects the SLAPP as an affirmative defense, the evidence
11 presented during the summary hearing shall form part of the evidence on the merits,
12 and the case shall proceed in accordance with the Rules of Court.

13
14 SEC. 14. *Territories of Life*. – All ancestral domains of the IPPs/ICCs shall be
15 deemed as Territories of Life, as it is grounded on nature's intrinsic value and their
16 customary belief in the sanctity of the land and oneness with nature. As such, all
17 ancestral domains shall be deemed to have rights as provided under Sections 4 and
18 5 hereof. Likewise, all protected areas declared under Republic Act No. 11038,
19 otherwise known as the "*Expanded National Integrated Protected Areas System Act*
20 *of 2018*" or "E-NIPAS," including those declared by the local government units (LGUs)
21 as protected areas, are deemed Territories of Life subject to the protection under this
22 Act. National development planning under the National Economic and Development
23 Authority (NEDA) and local development planning of the LGUs shall integrate the
24 appropriate development framework consistent with the Rights of Nature. The
25 Protected Area Management Board shall ensure that the management plans in all
26 protected areas are aligned with the objectives of the Act.

27
28 SEC. 15. *Role of the Indigenous Political Structure (IPS)*. – All IPS that are
29 present, as mandated by existing law, shall have the following duties and functions in
30 relation to the protection of the rights of nature and implementation of this Act:

- 31
32 a. Represent the interest of ecosystems and processes within the
33 respective jurisdiction of the LGUs where their ancestral domain is
34 located, including participation in the local development planning;
35 b. Ensure that IPs are consulted and give Free, Prior, and Informed
36 Consent (FPIC) for any development that may affect the ecosystem in
37 the Territories of Life;
38 c. Promote indigenous ecological values and practices by coordinating with
39 the Department of Education to incorporate them into the education
40 system.

41
42 SEC. 16. *Allocation of Funds from Other Sources*. – The DENR is hereby
43 mandated to allocate funds for the implementation of this Act sourced from the various
44 funds that the existing laws allow it to collect and disburse, such as the Integrated

1 Protected Area Fund (IPAF) under the E-NIPAS and Presidential Decree No. 389,
2 otherwise known as “*The Forestry Reform Code of the Philippines*,” among others.

3
4 SEC. 17. *Protection of Individuals and Communities that Depend on the*
5 *Environment for their Livelihood.* – Nothing in this Act shall be interpreted to diminish
6 or limit the rights of those whose livelihoods are dependent on the benefits derived
7 from the environment, such as IPs, fisherfolk, farmers, and the like, except to the
8 extent that their acts violate the Rights of Nature provided in this Act. They shall
9 likewise be deemed stewards of nature in areas where they habitually reside, taking
10 into account their local knowledge and practices in enhancing the health and
11 protection of nature. Any development projects, whether public or private, shall
12 undergo the consultation required under Sections 26 and 27 of Republic Act No. 7160,
13 otherwise known as the “*Local Government Code of 1991*.” Individuals and
14 communities referred to in this Section shall be indispensable parties in any
15 consultation or conduct of any study in relation to the proposed development project.

16
17 SEC. 18. *Review of the Environmental Impact Assessment Study System*
18 *(EIASS).* – The DENR, in consultation with the public and private sector, including the
19 Indigenous Peoples’ Mandatory Representatives (IPMRs) and local communities
20 referred under Section 19, shall conduct a review of the EIASS to align this System
21 with the rights under the provisions of this Act, to ensure that no public or private
22 projects or activities are approved or authorized which would violate the rights secured
23 in this Act.

24
25 SEC. 19. *Education.* – The Department of Education (DepEd) and the
26 Commission on Higher Education (CHED) shall integrate into the curriculum of all
27 levels the respect for and recognition of the inherent and inalienable rights of natural
28 ecosystems.

29
30 SEC. 20. *Enforcement and the Implementing Rules and Regulations.* – The
31 provisions of this Act shall be effective immediately upon the its adoption. The
32 Secretary of Environment and Natural Resources, in coordination with the
33 Commission on Human Rights (CHR), the Department of Social Welfare and
34 Development (DSWD), Department of Education (DepEd), Commission on Higher
35 Education (CHED), Department of Agriculture (DA), Department of Agrarian Reform
36 (DAR), National Commission on Indigenous Peoples (NCIP), Climate Change
37 Commission, and associations or organizations representing environmental
38 advocates, shall issue the Implementing Rules and Regulations to guide the efficient
39 implementation of this Act within ninety (90) days from the effectivity thereof.

40
41 SEC. 21. *Appropriations.* – The amount necessary for the initial implementation
42 of the provisions of this Act shall be charged against the current year’s appropriations
43 of the Department of Environment and Natural Resources (DENR). Thereafter, such

1 sums as may be necessary shall be included in the annual General Appropriations Act
2 (GAA).

3
4 SEC. 22. *Penalties.* – Any person who violates any of the provisions of this Act
5 or its Implementing Rules and Regulations shall, upon conviction by final judgment,
6 be punished by imprisonment of not less than six (6) months but more than two (2)
7 years or a fine of not less than Five Million pesos (PhP5,000,000) but more than Ten
8 Million pesos (PhP10,000,000), or both, at the discretion of the court. If the violation is
9 committed by a juridical person, the officer responsible therefor shall serve the
10 imprisonment when imposed. If violation is committed by an alien, he or she shall be
11 immediately deported after service of sentence, without need for further proceedings.

12
13 SEC. 23. *Separability Clause.* – If any provision of this Act is declared invalid
14 or unconstitutional, the provisions not affected thereby shall continue to be in full force
15 and effect.

16
17 SEC. 24. *Repealing Clause.* – All laws, executive orders, presidential decrees,
18 presidential proclamations, letters of instruction, rules and regulations, or parts thereof
19 inconsistent with the provisions of this Act are hereby repealed, modified, or amended
20 accordingly.

21
22 SEC. 25. *Effectivity.* – This Act shall take effect fifteen (15) days following its
23 publication in the Official Gazette or in two (2) newspapers of general circulation in the
24 Philippines.

Approved,

