World Future Policy Award

Living In Harmony With Nature & Future Generations

WORLD FUTURE POLICY AWARD 2025

World Future Council

1889
Inter-Parliamentary Union
For democracy. For everyone.

IUCN World Conservation Congress
Abu Dhabi 2025

To live in harmony with Nature, is to instil values of Earth Trusteeship within our policy making processes. In this sense, the World Future Policy Award this year offers a paradigm shift in celebrating our interconnectedness and interdependence on each other and our planet home.

Neshan Gunasekera, CEO World Future Council.

Let us listen to Mother Nature. If we can hear the frogs croak and birds sing, then we know that Papatuanuku is healthy. We must always keep the sound of these small creatures in our hearts, and remember that Mother Earth is there for many generations to come. This is the way indigenous people have lived with nature in the past, and will continue for eternity.

Pauline Tangiora, Māori Elder from the Rongomaiwahine Tribe on the East Coast of the North Island of Aotearoa/New Zealand, Honorary Councillor of the World Future Council.

World Future Council

The **World Future Council (WFC)** envisions a healthy planet with just and peaceful societies, both now and for all future generations of life. We are dedicated to identifying, developing, and promoting future-just solutions to the most pressing challenges facing humanity and all living beings, including Nature, today and in the future. The Council brings together 50 esteemed changemakers from civil society, science, politics, and business.

The **World Future Policy Award** is one of our flagship programmes, spotlighting transformative policies for a better world and Future.

worldfuturecouncil.org/future-policy-award

Dear reader,

Nature is not a resource—she is life itself. Yet, we are witnessing her deep wounds: forests vanish, oceans suffer, and over a million species face extinction. In this urgent moment, the World Future Council calls for a bold shift—from dominance to reverence, from short-term gain to long-term guardianship. To deepen this reverence is to increase our shared consciousness within Nature and to seek ways and means of improving ourselves in order to truly embody the meaning of living in harmony with Nature and future generations.

The World Future Policy Award (WFPA) was created to recognise policies offering practical, scalable, and inspiring solutions for present and future generations. As the world's foremost policy prize, we highlight outstanding policy achievements driving global action. Each award cycle focuses on a critical issue where policy advancement is urgently needed. The 14th WFPA centres on Living in Harmony with Nature and Future Generations and honours courageous policies that defend Nature's right to exist, breathe, and thrive as well as to deepen the understanding of the role of humans within Nature. These inspiring laws—born from Indigenous wisdom, international cooperation, and visionary leadership—recognise that we are not separate from Nature, but part of her.

From 41 nominations across 21 countries, lands, territories and initiatives, our distinguished independent jury of international experts has selected a group of innovative and effective award winners, each recognised for exceptional contributions to living in harmony with Nature.

We are delighted to introduce the 2025 WFPA winners. These policies provide more than just hope for a world in which Nature is preserved, protected, respected and restored. They also demonstrate that a paradigm shift towards a world that respects and protects Nature by recognising its legal rights and personhood is possible. The winning policies serve as a practical blueprint for policymakers worldwide, with adaptable solutions to today's complex challenges.

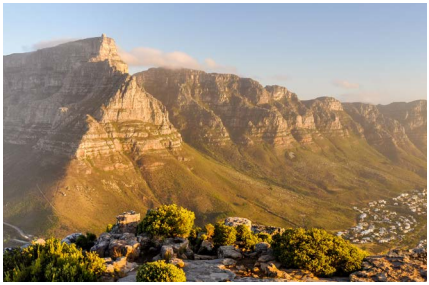
To deepen this reverence is to increase our shared consciousness within Nature and to seek ways and means of improving ourselves in order to truly embody the meaning of living in harmony with Nature and future generations.

Your World Future Policy Award Team

Biodiversity Act (2003, amended 2022), *Bhutan*

The Biodiversity Act of Bhutan reflects the country's philosophy of Gross National Happiness and commitment to future generations. First adopted in 2003 and strengthened in 2022, it secures Bhutan's sovereign rights over biological and genetic resources, ensures fair benefit-sharing, and safeguards traditional knowledge.

The Act regulates access through prior consent and contracts, empowers communities in biodiversity governance, and integrates science with cultural values. By aligning with the Nagoya Protocol, Bhutan is advancing conservation, positioning itself as a global model for harmony with Nature.



The National Environmental Management: Biodiversity Act (NEM:BA), 2004, *South Africa*

South Africa's NEM:BA (2004) is the country's flagship biodiversity law, a pioneering law that protects one of the world's richest natural heritages. Grounded in the constitutional right to a healthy environment, it secures intergenerational equity through a science-based governance system and safeguards biodiversity for present and future generations.

The Act introduced groundbreaking measures for threatened and invasive species, benefit-sharing, and public participation. Through forthcoming reforms that integrate climate resilience and sustainable financing, this rights-based model of biodiversity governance provides a source of global inspiration.

The National Environment Act, 2019, *Uganda*

A pioneering step for people and planet, Uganda's National Environment Act sets a bold standard in environmental governance. Replacing the 1995 law, it tackles today's pressing challenges—from biodiversity loss and climate change to hazardous chemicals—while empowering the National Environment Management Authority (NEMA) to safeguard ecosystems.

With mandatory impact assessments, stronger oversight, and recognition of the Rights of Nature, this groundbreaking Act ensures that Uganda's rich natural heritage is protected for both present and future generations, embedding intergenerational equity at its core.

Law 287 which recognises the Rights of Nature and the related obligations of the State with these rights (2022), *Panama*

In 2022, Panama made history by recognising Nature as a living being with rights. Law 287 doesn't just protect the environment — it gives it a voice. Inspired by Indigenous wisdom and driven by youth leadership, this bold law grants ecosystems the right to exist, thrive, regenerate and be restored. The law empowers both citizens and the state to defend Nature in court and has already halted major mining projects and shaped new conservation laws.

With roots in global movements and eyes on the future, Panama's Law 287 sets a global example for aligning governance with ecological integrity and sustainability. It shows the world that caring for Nature means standing up for life itself.

Law 19/2022 – Granting Mar Menor and its basin status of a legal person, *Spain*

In 2022, Spain set a global milestone by granting the Mar Menor Lagoon and its basin legal personhood, and thus, becoming the first country in Europe to grant legal personhood to an ecosystem. This groundbreaking law, driven by personal commitment of one individual recognises the lagoon's rights to exist, regenerate, and be restored. It marks a shift from a human-centred to an ecocentric approach to law. It empowers communities, scientists, and institutions through participatory governance and allows anyone, nationally or internationally, to defend the lagoon in court. This pioneering step proves that Western legal systems can embrace the Rights of Nature, and is an inspiring model for the world.

The Tiroler Umweltanwaltschaft (Environmental Ombudsperson of Tyrol) 1991, *Tyrol/Austria*

In Tyrol, Austria, the Environmental Ombudsperson (Tiroler Umwelt-anwaltschaft) has been giving Nature a voice since 1991. Anchored in Tyrol's Nature Protection Law, it acts as an independent guardian for biodiversity, future generations, and the common good.

With strong legal standing, open processes, and active outreach — from Citizen Biotopes to youth initiatives — it connects people and institutions. By inspiring and fostering cultural and emotional bonds with the natural world, it showcases how participatory governance can help us live in harmony with Nature.

VISION AWARD

Agreement under the *UN Convention on the Law of the Sea* on the Conservation and Sustainable Use of Marine Biological Diversity of Areas beyond National Jurisdiction (BBNJ) 2023

For the first time, nations unite to protect life in the high seas! Adopted in 2023, the BBNJ Agreement marks a historic step in ocean stewardship. As the first binding treaty for areas beyond national borders, it tackles biodiversity loss in the high seas through marine protected areas, impact assessments, fair sharing of genetic resources, and technology transfer.

Rooted in equity and intergenerational responsibility, it advances global cooperation while affirming the oceans as a common heritage of humankind and a living treasure. Though awaiting ratification, it lays the foundation for protecting marine life for present and future generations.

GLOBAL IMPACT AWARD

Te Awa Tupua (Whanganui River Claims Settlement) Act 2017, *Aotearoa New Zealand*

The Te Awa Tupua Act granted the Whanganui River legal personhood, making it the world's first river and natural landscape to be recognised as a living being, indivisible from its people and land, with rights and responsibilities. Rooted in Māori worldview and kaitiakitanga (guardianship), the Act restores the river's health, addresses historical injustices, and upholds intergenerational justice. It creates a co-governance model between Māori, communities and the Crown to protect the river.

Celebrated worldwide, it offers a powerful vision of living in harmony with Nature and protecting it for future generations. This landmark law has inspired global movements in environmental jurisprudence and Indigenous rights.

Award-winning policies...

- Demonstrate best practices in policy design and execution
- Achieve measurable, impactful results
- Show proven implementation over 2-3 years
- Demonstrate adaptability to changing contexts
- Act as guardians of natural resources and are effective in protecting, restoring and conserving Nature as well recognising the rights of Nature
- Embody diversity and inclusivity in approach and impact; address the perspectives and rights of indigenous peoples and local communities
- Serve as exemplary models for replication
- Inspire transformation and innovation
- Align with the World Future Council's 7 Future-Just Principles
- Reach the full potential of current and future generations of life

Award categories

6

WORLD FUTURE POLICY AWARD WINNERS

These policies are outstanding candidates.

1

VISION AWARD WINNER

A policy with visionary objectives and promise.

1

GLOBAL IMPACT AWARD

The Global Impact Award highlights the policy's role as a pioneering model that inspires laws and movements around the world.

Our Evaluation Process

Throughout this WFPA, we were deeply moved by the insightful perspectives shared by individuals and local actors from civil society, academia, local authorities and policy sectors, all working together to protect and restore Nature, for present and future generations.

Samia Kassid & Augustina Schick
Team WFPA 25

1 DEFINING THE TOPIC

In response to the urgent global need for effective policy solutions to protect biodiversity and Nature also in the longterm the WFPA was dedicated to the theme "Living in Harmony with Nature and Future Generations".

2 CALL FOR NOMINATIONS

Ministries, experts and civil society were invited to nominate laws and policies.

3 RESEARCH

The team selected 18 policies to advance, based on research and award criteria.

4 PRE-SELECTION

We reviewed nominations and conducted extensive research producing reports on all eligible policies.

5 INTERVIEWS

We conducted in-depth interviews with experts from various fields, using the "Seven Principles for Future-Just Lawmaking Framework".

6 JURY REPORT

Based on interviews and research, we shortlisted 13 final policies for the jury, providing analysis and award recommendations.

7 JURY MEETING

The jury determined the winners, with shortlisted candidates announced to the press afterwards.

8 AWARD CEREMONY

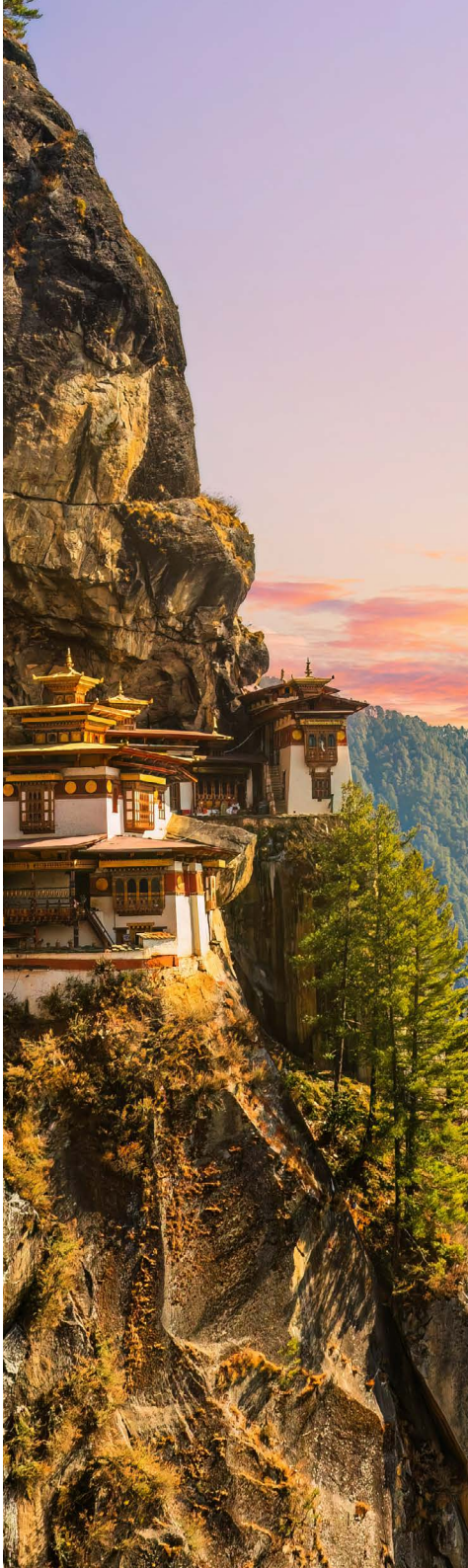
Winners are celebrated at a high-level award ceremony jointly with the IUCN at the IUCN World Conservation Congress in Abu Dhabi, held on October 11, 2025.

WORLD FUTURE POLICY AWARD

Biodiversity Act (2003, amended 2022), *Bhutan*

Bhutan has woven its ancient wisdom into modern law. Its Biodiversity Act, first enacted in 2003 and strengthened in 2022, reflects the nation's commitment to live in harmony with Nature. Grounded in the philosophy of Gross National Happiness, the Act protects Bhutan's rich ecosystems—where forests cover 70% of the land—and safeguards traditional knowledge passed down through generations. It empowers local communities, ensures fair benefit-sharing, and upholds Bhutan's sovereign rights over its genetic resources.

With clear legal pathways for access, use, and conservation, this landmark law offers a powerful model of environmental stewardship for the world and future generations.



Key features

- **Legal sovereignty and access regulation:** Affirms national sovereignty over genetic and biological resources.
- **Access and Benefit Sharing (ABS) frameworks:** Regulates the use of genetic resources by requiring Material Transfer Agreements and negotiated contracts.
- **Protection of traditional knowledge:** Protects traditional knowledge legally and can only be accessed with community consent and benefit-sharing.
- **Recognition of farmers' and breeders' Rights:** Recognises Indigenous and local communities' innovations and varieties. A Sui Generis System secures plant variety rights.
- **Scientific and precautionary approach:** Promotes technology transfer and capacity building at the national and local levels.

Achievements

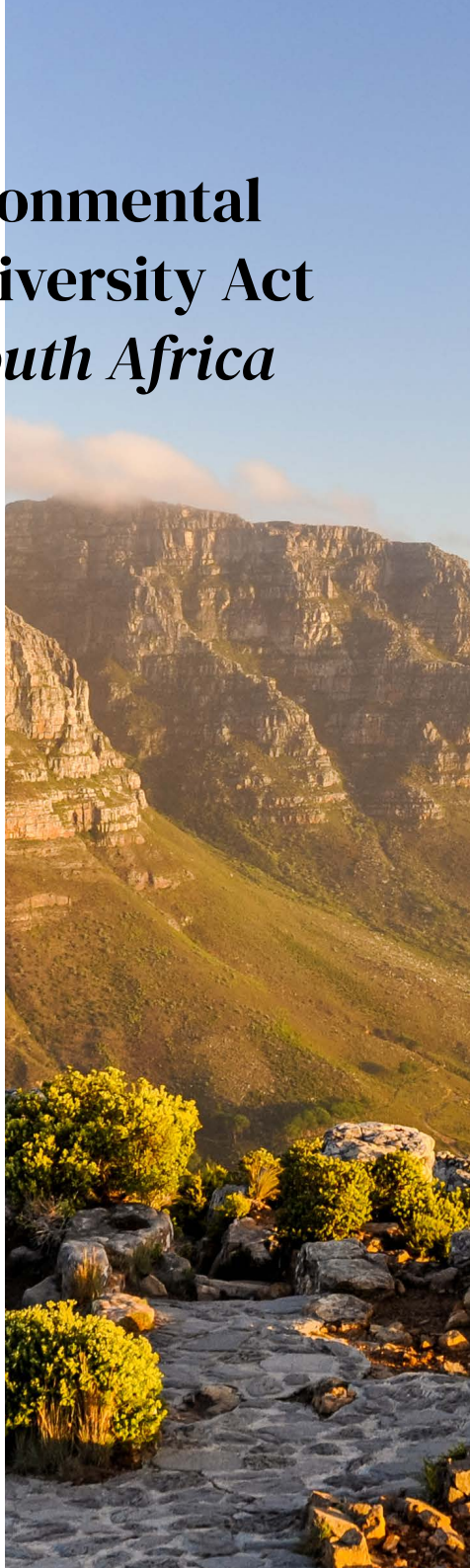
- ✓ **Expansion of Protected Areas and forest cover:** Bhutan now maintains 51.44 % of its land area under protected status.
- ✓ **Species conservation successes:** The population of the Royal Bengal Tiger increased from 75 in 1998 to 103 in 2015.
- ✓ **Community forests and Sustainable livelihoods:** By 2018, there were more than 780 designated community forests covering 92,000 hectares in Bhutan.
- ✓ **Implementation of Access and Benefit Sharing (ABS) Agreements:** Fourteen ABS agreements have been signed.
- ✓ **Ex-situ conservation infrastructure:** Establishes national gene banks for plants and animals contributing to the preservation of over 3,500 accessions of traditional crops and 27,000 genetic samples of indigenous animal breeds.
- ✓ **Integration into education and research:** Mainstreams biodiversity education into school curricula.

Influence & challenges

The Act offers a legally grounded and culturally integrated model that is particularly suited for replication in other biodiversity-rich countries. Putting it into practice has proven difficult. Progress has been slowed by long consultations, resistance from institutions, and gaps in global frameworks and complex parliamentary procedures. Despite these challenges, the Act remains a progressive step that highlights both the promise and the difficulty of transforming ambitious biodiversity commitments into effective protection on the ground. The Access and Benefit Sharing (ABS) framework has been presented in policy workshops and forums in Cambodia, Malaysia, Japan, and India.

WORLD FUTURE POLICY AWARD

The National Environmental Management: Biodiversity Act (NEM:BA), 2004, *South Africa*



South Africa's National Environmental Management: Biodiversity Act (NEM:BA) is the nation's flagship biodiversity law, rooted in the Constitution's guarantee of a healthy environment for present and future generations. It translates this right into action through a science-based governance system that combines national strategies with local Biodiversity Management Plans.

NEM:BA pioneered invasive- and threatened-species regimes, fair benefit-sharing, and established the South African National Biodiversity Institute (SANBI) to anchor decisions in independent science. It ensures public participation and cooperative governance, aligning national practice with international obligations.

Despite challenges of underfunding and uneven implementation, NEM:BA has become a cornerstone of sustainable development.

Key features

- **Strategic planning architecture:** Provides for a set of legally binding tools.
- **Institutional science backbone:** Creates The South African National Biodiversity Institute (SANBI).
- **Precaution and Adaptive Science:** Institutionalises the precautionary principle via IUCN-aligned threat listing and mandatory Environmental Impact Assessments (EIAs).
- **Participatory and linguistic inclusivity:** Requires legally public consultations for all substantive regulations and their publication in all 11 official languages.
- **Integration with development planning:** Embeds Biodiversity priority areas Critical Biodiversity Areas (CBA) and Ecological Support Areas (ESA) into the National Development Plan (NDP).

Achievements

- ✓ **Threatened Ecosystem Protection:** 462 ecosystems are legally listed with species conservation and invasive species control.
- ✓ **Municipal mainstreaming:** 89% of municipalities now incorporate Critical Biodiversity Areas into statutory Spatial Development Frameworks.
- ✓ **Educational integration:** Biodiversity concepts are included in school curricula, university research, and public outreach.
- ✓ **Employment:** Environmental public-works programmes create employment for marginalised rural workers.
- ✓ **Wider Protected Areas:** Growing coverage on land and in the sea.

Influence & challenges

South Africa is advancing biodiversity governance through innovative tools and global partnerships. The National Biodiversity Assessment and SANBI's "managed network" model are internationally acclaimed, supporting long-term planning and data sharing across Africa. Tools like "Mapping Biodiversity Priorities" and Critical Biodiversity Areas help align national efforts with global conservation targets. Framing ecosystems as "ecological infrastructure" strengthens links to water security, disaster resilience, and rural development, reinforcing responsibility across generations. While challenges exist—including funding gaps, uneven provincial capacity, and limited integration across sectors—these offer clear opportunities for innovation, inclusive partnerships, and adaptive governance to further enhance South Africa's role as a biodiversity leader for now and the future.

WORLD FUTURE POLICY AWARD

The National Environment Act, 2019, *Uganda*

Uganda's National Environment Act, 2019 marks a courageous step toward safeguarding the country's natural heritage and securing a healthy future for generations to come. Replacing the 1995 law, it creates a modern and comprehensive framework to protect biodiversity, combat pollution, and address climate change. The Act empowers the National Environment Management Authority to coordinate and enforce action, while mandating environmental and social impact assessments and introducing strategic planning tools.

Unique in Africa, it recognises the rights of Nature and enshrines the duty to maintain a clean and healthy environment for both present and future generations. Born from broad public consultation and aligned with global commitments, the law reflects Uganda's commitment to sustainable development and intergenerational equity.

Key features

- **Strategic Environmental Assessment:** Ensures that all government policies, plans, and programmes are assessed for environmental impact before implementation.
- **Institutional and multi-level governance framework:** Strengthens the institutional architecture.
- **Pollution and waste management controls:** Establishes strict controls on pollution, including licensing, liability, and emergency preparedness.
- **Public participation and access to information:** Guarantees access to environmental information and mandates the integration of environmental literacy into education.
- **Environmental monitoring, audits, and enforcement:** Monitors environmental compliance through audits, inspections, and the issuance of orders.

Achievements

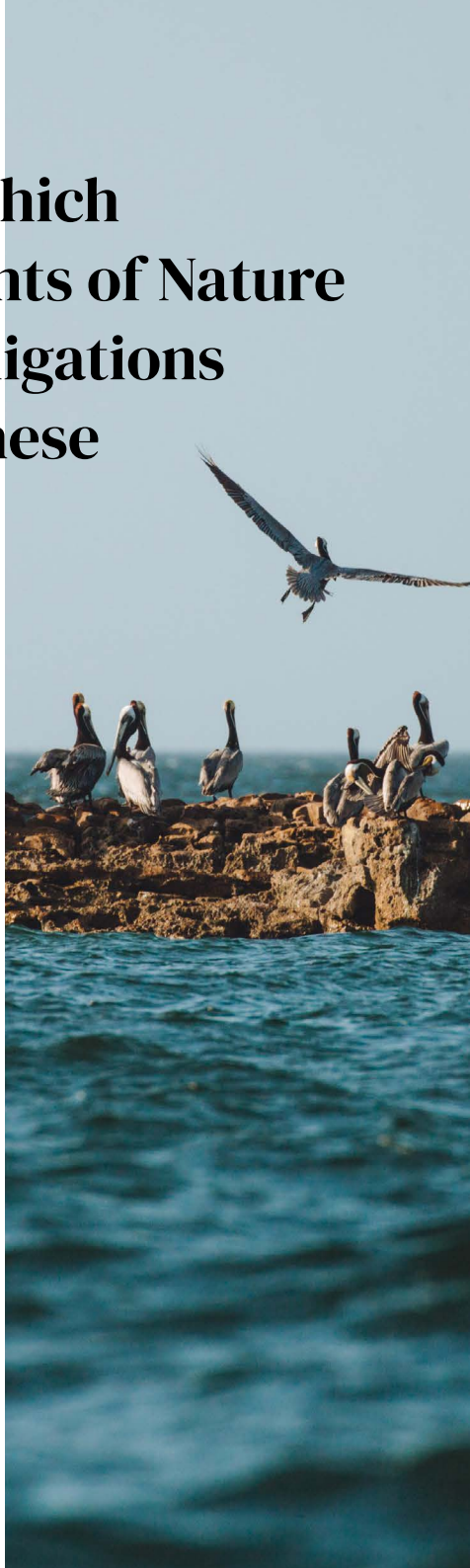
- ✓ **Restoration and expansion of wetland coverage:** Since 2020, approximately 445 km2 of wetlands have been restored.
- ✓ **Pollution control mechanisms:** Polluters are obliged to obtain a pollution control licence to operate legally and limit environmental harm.
- ✓ **Education:** Environmental literacy is being integrated into all education levels.
- ✓ **Strengthening communities:** Promotes community-based forest management, income-generating activities, cultural practices and community knowledge in planning.

Influence & challenges

The Act sets a strong foundation for ecological stewardship—recognising the rights of Nature, promoting intergenerational equity, and integrating environmental literacy into education. Its modular approach, featuring tools like Strategic Environmental Assessments, biodiversity offsets, pollution control, and community involvement, offers a model for other low- and middle-income countries. While implementation faces challenges—such as funding delays, limited technical capacity, and weak coordination—the Act reflects Uganda's commitment to sustainability and provides a flexible, forward-looking legal framework adaptable to countries with similar environmental and governance needs.

WORLD FUTURE POLICY AWARD

Law 287 of 2022, which recognises the Rights of Nature and the related obligations of the State with these rights, *Panama*



Panama took a historic step with Law No. 287 of 2022, recognising Nature as a subject of rights. This groundbreaking law grants ecosystems the rights to exist, regenerate, and be restored—shifting environmental governance from human-centered to ecocentric. Rooted in Indigenous wisdom and global models, it empowers citizens and the state to defend Nature in court, as seen in the ruling that halted Central America's largest mining project.

Initiated by a young activist and championed by the country's youngest legislator, the law protects Panama's rich biodiversity and showcases the vital role of young people in advancing a shared future for people, Nature, and generations to come.

Key features

- **Legal rights for Nature:** Grants Nature rights including the rights to exist, persist, regenerate, be restored and extends it to all living beings, elements, and ecosystems.
- **Ecocentric legal and precautionary principles:** Includes principles such as "the superior interest of the Nature", "in dubio pro natura", "in dubio pro aqua" and the precautionary principle.
- **Universal legal standing:** Allows any individual or legal entity to bring claims on behalf of Nature before administrative or judicial bodies.
- **Indigenous integration:** Centers Indigenous knowledge and cosmovision in legal interpretation and implementation.
- **Policy, energy and economic reform mandates:** Directs the state to embed Nature's rights at the heart of national planning, policymaking, and economic strategies.
- **Environmental Education:** Mandates rights of Nature as part of national environmental education programmes.

Achievements

- ✓ **Judicial enforcement:** The Supreme Court annulled a mining contract in 2023 under Law 287, protecting key forest areas.
- ✓ **New legislation:** Grants rights to sea turtles, citing Law 287 as its legal basis.
- ✓ **Civic engagement and awareness:** Environmental activism is growing, fueled by stronger legal literacy and public confidence in legal remedies.

Influence & challenges

Law 287 fosters a national "Culture of Harmony with Nature" and is inspiring similar initiatives across the region, including efforts by the Eastern Tropical Pacific Marine Corridor (CMAR) to integrate Nature's rights into grant agreements. With its strong cultural, ecological, and legal foundation, Law 287 offers a transferable model for other biodiversity-rich countries. While challenges remain—such as the need for stronger enforcement tools and balanced economic strategies—ongoing legal audits and growing public engagement reflect Panama's commitment to aligning development with environmental protection. It also stands as a living example of how people and Nature can thrive together for present and future generations.

WORLD FUTURE POLICY AWARD

Law 19/2022 – Granting Mar Menor and its basin status of a legal person, *Spain*

Spain's Law 19/2022 is a landmark in environmental protection, granting the Mar Menor Lagoon and its basin legal personhood—the first case of its kind in Europe. This pioneering law recognises the lagoon's right to exist, regenerate, and be defended in court, shifting jurisprudence from human-centered to eco-centered. Born out of citizen activism and backed by people's movement, it empowers communities, scientists, and institutions to act as guardians, ensuring protection against decades of pollution from agriculture, mining, and tourism.

With inclusive governance bodies and participatory enforcement, the law transforms public demand into a robust legal shield for Europe's largest coastal lagoon. It is not only a response to ecological crisis but also a visionary model of intergenerational justice, showing how modern democracies can give voice and rights to Nature itself. In addition, the creation of this law is the result of the personal commitment of an individual, which deserves special mention.

Key features

- **Legal Personhood and Rights:** Grants legal personality to the Mar Menor and its basin.
- **Universal Legal Standing:** Grants standing to any person or legal entity to initiate legal or administrative actions.
- **Governance Structure – Tutoría del Mar Menor:** Creates three strong governance bodies.
- **Precautionary Principle and Preventive Action:** Apply precautionary measures to safeguard the lagoon in the face of uncertainty.
- **Public Awareness, Education Mandates, Ecosystem Recovery:** Promotes social awareness, education campaigns and a comprehensive recovery plan.
- **Scientific Monitoring and Reporting:** Applies technology for restoration, while emphasizing cultural and mindset change.
- **Judicial and Legislative Impact:** Enables direct legal defence of the lagoon and leading to environmental jurisprudence.

Achievements

- ✓ In 2023, Spain's courts first enforced the Mar Menor Law to address **toxic mining waste entering the lagoon**.
- ✓ Successful **prosecution of a multinational company corporation** for prior discharges.
- ✓ **Heightened state budget allocation** for restoration of the Mar Menor.

Influence & challenges

Spain's Law 19/2022 on the Rights of the Mar Menor marks the first recognition of ecosystem personhood in European law. It embeds intergenerational and biocultural justice, fosters civic engagement, and has inspired movements across Spain and Europe, even influencing UN reports. While challenges include institutional overlap, unclear coordination, limited enforcement, and risks of corruption or legal tensions with property rights, the law carefully balances these concerns. Its neutral legal language and adaptable framework make it highly replicable across Europe and beyond, showing that Western legal systems can embrace rights of Nature without disruption.

WORLD FUTURE POLICY AWARD

Tyrolean Environmental Ombudsoffice (Tiroler Umweltanwaltschaft), 1999, 2005, 2014, *Tyrol/Austria*

The Tyrolean Environmental Ombudsoffice is represented by Tyrol's independent Environmental Ombudsperson, created to give Nature a voice in decision-making. Rooted in law since 1991, and strengthened by the Tyrol Nature Conservation Law 2005, the Environmental Ombudsoffice bridges civil society and public administration, ensuring ecological concerns are central to land use, infrastructure, and conservation planning.

More than a watchdog, it fosters cultural and emotional ties with Nature through Citizen Biotopes, youth engagement, and participatory outreach. Its mission goes beyond legal enforcement, embodying a vision of interconnectedness and respect for all life forms. Trusted by the public, operating transparently, and guided by inclusive practices, the Environmental Ombudsoffice demonstrates how biodiversity conservation, public participation, and future stewardship can be effectively combined and implemented.

Key features

- **Legal status:** Embedded right to sue on behalf of Nature, safeguarded through autonomy by law.
- **Public engagement:** Leads in policy advice, project consultation, citizen engagement, and administrative support.
- **Legal oversight and enforcement:** Monitors compliance with environmental law and appeals harmful or unlawful decisions.
- **Decentralised local engagement:** Bridges public, civil, and private actors through regional networks.
- **Collaboration:** Multi-sector collaboration with the civil society, NGOs and economic actors.

Achievements

- ✓ **Stronger Legal Action:** Over 2,000 cases reviewed and 29 legal complaints filed in Tyrol (2021–2022).
- ✓ **Growing public awareness:** Public complaints rose by 25% from 2020 to 2022, reaching nearly 300 cases.
- ✓ **New innovate formats:** Introduces "Open Mic" in collaboration with Patagonia or Citizen Biotopes, promotes community-created biodiversity spaces.
- ✓ **Integration of Nature and society:** Supports traditional farming and seed regeneration while opposing commercial redevelopment of farmland.
- ✓ **Tourism:** Advises winter sport tourism, hydroelectric power plants or night pollution.
- ✓ **New innovative projects:** Advocates for the rights of the Isel River in Tyrol.

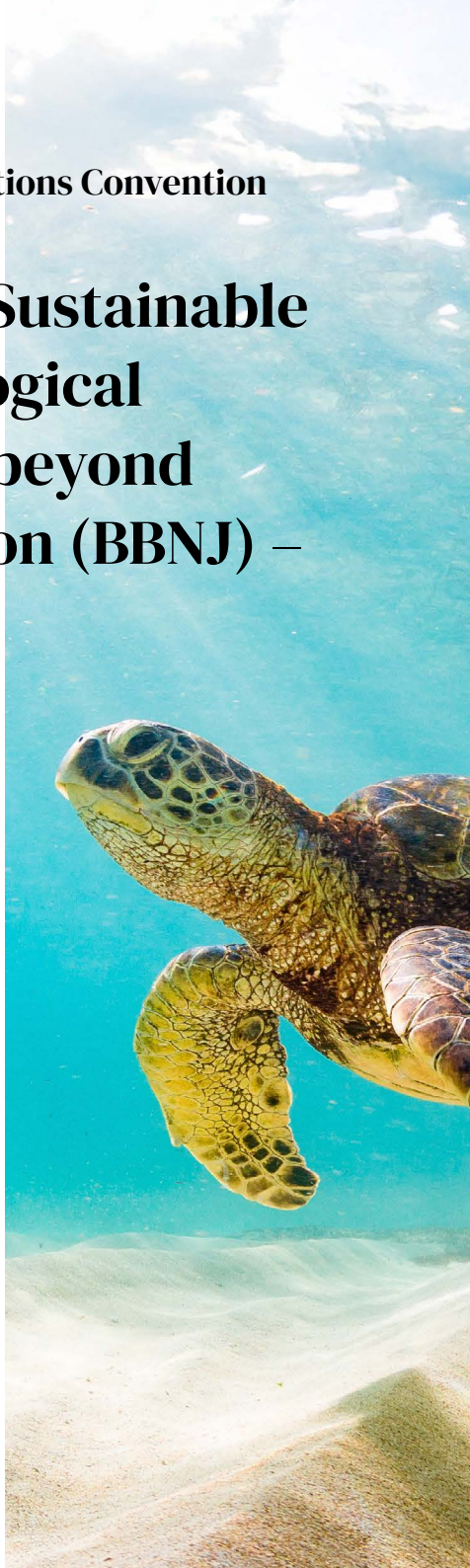
Influence & challenges

The Tyrolean Environmental Ombudsoffice serves as a vital advocate for Nature in policy decisions, promoting inclusive governance and stewardship values across all levels. By combining legal and educational tools, it drives systemic change and intergenerational thinking, while supporting ecological goals like moorland protection. Despite challenges—such as growing funding needs and political pressure from anti-environmental movements—the Ombudsoffice's sustained advocacy highlights the power of long-term engagement. Its holistic, dialogue-based approach offers a replicable model for sub-national environmental governance and is gaining attention beyond Austria as a transferable framework for regional advocacy worldwide.

VISION AWARD

Agreement under the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea on the

Conservation and Sustainable Use of Marine Biological Diversity of Areas beyond National Jurisdiction (BBNJ) – Adopted 2023



The 2023 Agreement on Biodiversity Beyond National Jurisdiction (BBNJ) marks a turning point for the future of our oceans. For the first time, the global community has a binding treaty dedicated to conserving and sustainably using marine biodiversity in the vast high seas, which make up two-thirds of the ocean. Building on the UN Convention on the Law of the Sea, the agreement sets out robust provisions for creating marine protected areas. Rooted in equity, cooperation, and stewardship for future generations, it acknowledges the intrinsic value of ocean ecosystems and reflects a spirit of trusteeship for humankind. By filling a long-standing legal gap in ocean governance, the BBNJ Agreement is a milestone in multilateral diplomacy and a foundation for safeguarding life in the world's ocean.

Key features

- **Marine Genetic Resources (MGRs) and fair benefit-sharing:** Establishes a global system for fair benefit-sharing of marine genetic resources and digital sequence data.
- **Area-Based Management Tools (ABMTs):** Supports the creation of ecologically representative, well-connected Marine Protected Areas (MPAs) and ABMTs in areas beyond national jurisdiction.
- **Environmental Review:** Embeds mandatory Environmental Impact Assessments (EIAs).
- **Capacity building and technology transfer:** Commits to strengthen research capacity and improve technology access for Global South, Small Island, and landlocked states.
- **Indigenous and local knowledge:** Requires free, prior, and informed consent to access to marine genetic resources.

Achievements

- ✓ **Legal innovation and global governance framework:** Establishes the first legally binding regime for biodiversity conservation in Areas Beyond National Jurisdiction (ABNJ), filling a governance gap in international law.
- ✓ **Recognition of equity and common heritage:** Reaffirms the principle of the common heritage of humankind and embeds procedural and substantive equity norms, mandatory benefit-sharing, capacity-building, and recognition of needs of Global South countries.
- ✓ **Contribution to global biodiversity targets:** Supports the Kunming-Montreal "30 by 30" biodiversity target.
- ✓ **Procedural tools for transparency and inclusion:** Encourages participatory governance.

Influence & challenges

The BBNJ Agreement, awaiting ratification by 60 States, pioneers a holistic, ecosystem-based approach to ocean governance. While enforcement depends on national laws, cooperation, and peer accountability, it faces challenges such as jurisdictional overlaps and the pace of ratification. Yet its vision is transformative: affirming intergenerational equity and promoting global solidarity. By fostering scientific cooperation, fair access to resources, and transparency, it shifts from exploitation to stewardship. Flexible and scalable, the BBNJ serves as a model for governing global commons, inspiring new marine protections from the Baltic Sea to the Pacific.

GLOBAL IMPACT AWARD

Te Awa Tupua (Whanganui River Claims Settlement) Act, 2017, *Aotearoa New Zealand*

Rooted in the Māori worldview—"Ko au te Awa, ko te Awa ko au" ("I am the River, and the River is me")—the Act affirms centuries of spiritual and cultural connection between the Whanganui Iwi and their ancestral river. It redresses historical injustices, embedding Indigenous values like kaitiakitanga (guardianship) into national law, and establishes a co-governance model between Māori and the Crown. By granting the river rights and voice, it creates a powerful framework for intergenerational justice and environmental stewardship.

More than legal innovation, it is a community-owned vision that bridges Indigenous and Western law, inspiring a global movement to live in harmony with Nature.

New Category

The **Global Impact Award** has transformative influence on legal and policy thinking worldwide. It inspires a global movement and serves as a model or inspiration for further movements and contributes to a fundamental paradigm shift.

Key features

- **Legal Personhood:** Recognises the Whanganui River and its natural landscape as a legal entity with legal rights, duties and responsibilities as a whole, Māori's deep spiritual connection to the river and aims to protect and enhance this relationship.
- **Intrinsic Values – Tupua te Kawa:** Embodies the river's essence, guiding all actions in its name and honouring its role in spiritual, physical, and environmental wellbeing, with kaitiakitanga (guardianship) at the core.
- **Te Pou Tupua:** Serves as the human face and voice of Te Awa Tupua and deciding as one person, held jointly by two appointees of the Whanganui Iwi and the Crown—symbolising their partnership.
- **Te Heke Ngahuru:** A community-led strategy (2023) shifting from Western governance models to a Te Awa Tupua–centered approach, jointly led by the Crown, local government, and Iwi Māori.

Achievements

- ✓ **Community well-being:** Centers on the river system as a whole, guided by Indigenous values.
- ✓ **Cultural and legal recognition:** Integrates Te Reo Māori and tikanga (Māori language customary principles) into national law, affirming Indigenous worldviews.
- ✓ **Te Pou Tupua:** Represents a unique, dual-guardian governance and gender balanced model for natural entities.
- ✓ **Environmental Management:** Involve tribes and reflect community values and guidance.

Influence & challenges

Aotearoa New Zealand's Te Awa Tupua Act (2017) grants the Whanganui River legal personhood, embedding a kinship-based ethic rooted in Te Ao Māori (Māori worldview, a holistic perspective that emphasises the profound interconnectedness of all things—people, nature, and the spiritual world) and offering a living model of pluralistic, decolonised governance. It fosters holistic management, intergenerational stewardship, and a culture of harmony with Nature. Yet challenges remain: limited Crown support, tensions between Māori and Western legal systems, political efforts to weaken Māori cultural standing, and unresolved questions of legal liability. Despite these, the Act is internationally recognised as a landmark in ecological jurisprudence and a replicable model for contexts with strong Indigenous traditions.

Other nominated policies

EU: Nature Restoration Law 2024

Adopted in June 2024, the Law is a groundbreaking regulation that commits all Member States to restore Europe's ecosystems. As the first binding law of its kind, it requires countries to restore at least 20% of degraded land and sea by 2030, with ambitious goals for 2040 and 2050. Covering forests, rivers, peatlands, farmlands, cities, and marine areas, it strengthens resilience, safeguards biodiversity and connectivity across Europe's regions. Rooted in science, shaped by broad participation, and enforceable by EU institutions, the law sets a global benchmark for ecological recovery and stewardship — safeguarding Nature for present and future generations.

Japan: Basic Act on Biodiversity (2008)

Enacted in 2008, Japan's Basic Act on Biodiversity is a pioneering framework that unites conservation, cultural heritage, and citizen engagement. It mandates the creation and regular revision of national and local biodiversity strategies, inspiring over 180 local plans and even a visionary "100-Year Program" to restore ecosystems. Rooted in tradition and participation, the Act mainstreams biodiversity across sectors, integrates ecological knowledge, and promotes intergenerational equity. Though not reliant on strict enforcement, it has driven lasting institutional, policy, and cultural change, making it a global model for adaptive, participatory, and forward-looking biodiversity governance.

Norway: Nature Diversity Act, 2009

Adopted in 2009, Norway's Nature Diversity Act (NDA) is a transformative framework that unites conservation and sustainable use under one law. It applies across ecosystems, species, and landscapes, replacing fragmented regulations with a holistic approach. The Act enshrines Nature's intrinsic value, intergenerational equity, and the precautionary principle, while requiring public authorities to integrate biodiversity into all decisions. It also honors Indigenous knowledge, particularly that of the Sámi, and ensures public participation and legal recourse. Despite some challenges, the NDA remains a global model of ecocentric, cross-sectoral governance and long-term stewardship.

Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework (2022)

The Kunming-Montreal Global Biodiversity Framework (GBF) offers a unifying roadmap to halt and reverse biodiversity loss by 2030. With its "30x30" target, clear goals for 2050, and 23 action points, it calls for protecting ecosystems, shifting values, and tackling the drivers of biodiversity decline. Born from inclusive negotiations, it honours Indigenous Peoples and local communities while embracing a rights-based, participatory, and science-driven approach. Though not legally binding, it is already shaping laws, inspiring political will, and guiding global action. Rooted in intergenerational justice, the GBF envisions a just, sustainable future in harmony with Nature.

UAE: Federal Law No. 24 on the Protection and Development of the Environment, 1999

Federal Law No. 24 is the cornerstone of the UAE's environmental governance, uniting protections for air, water, soil, biodiversity, and public health in one comprehensive framework. It institutionalises environmental impact assessments, establishes liability for violations, and strengthens coordination across federal and emirate levels. The law has improved environmental performance, expanded protected areas, and fostered green innovation and awareness. Today, as it undergoes revision to integrate climate targets, carbon neutrality, and the Net Zero by 2050 Strategy, it continues to stand as a pioneering model for sustainability and biodiversity protection in the Middle East.

Reflections and Recommendations for Policy Makers

1 Recognise Legal Obligations drawing upon all Sources of Law

Implement climate and biodiversity obligations drawing from all sources of law, including through harmonising principles of customary international law with those under multilateral agreements.

2 Embed Principles of Intergenerational Equity in Policy

Ensure present decisions safeguard dignified living conditions for future generations, inspired by Indigenous principles such as the Seven Generations ethic or the principle of Kaitiakitanga from the Māori world view reinforcing the role of guardians.

3 Advance Rights of Nature Frameworks

Adopt legislation that recognises ecosystems as legal subjects, integrating ecological and cultural values into governance.

4 Implement decision of International, Regional, National Courts as Catalysts

Include provisions for implementing decisions of international, regional and national courts that further the principles of international law, especially concerning our duties to current and future generations of life on the planet.

5 Strengthen Ecological Jurisprudence

Support judges, lawyers, legislators and wider stakeholders in expanding legal traditions to incorporate environmental stewardship and Earth Trusteeship, drawing on models from Ecuador, Aotearoa – New Zealand, Spain, Panama and other examples.

6 Promote Civic Engagement and Inclusive Governance

Empower Indigenous peoples, local communities, and civil society as co-creators of policy, ensuring pluralistic and participatory decision-making.

7 Secure Financial Resources for Transformative Change

Prioritise funding and capacity-building to turn legal commitments into real-world ecological restoration and protection.

8 Give Future Generations a Voice at the Table

Institutionalise future justice mechanisms – ombudspersons, commissioners, or parliamentary mandates – so that unborn generations are considered in all policy decision and accountability mechanisms are built into such policies.

The ever-deeper conquest of nature via resource extraction and economic expansion has serious consequences for all life on earth. The World Future Policy Award 2025 highlights policy measures that assure protection and regeneration of the world's ecosystems, whilst safeguarding the needs of present and future generations.

Herbert Girardet, Co-founder of the World Future Council, Member of the Club of Rome

Meet the Jury

Ms Tavus G.A.

Policy Officer, Centre for Policy and Law, IUCN.

Christian Cray

Board Member of the German Rights of Nature Network, and represents the European platform of the Global Alliance for the Rights of Nature.

Christopher Dunn

Executive Director of Cornell Botanic Gardens, current Chair of the IUCN National Committee for the USA.

Anda Filip

Director for Member Parliaments & External Relations at the Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU), Councillor of the WFC.

Luc Gnacadja

Founder & President of GPS-Dev, past Minister of Environment and Urban Development (Benin), Councillor of the WFC.

Neshan Gunasekera

Chief Executive Officer, World Future Council, international lawyer, former Councillor of the WFC.

Prof. Kathryn Gwiazdon

Executive Director, Center for Environmental Ethics and Law. Chair of the Ethics Specialist Group of the IUCN World Commission on Environmental Law.

Roberto Hernández Juárez

Climate activist & advocate for youth empowerment, Director General of Youth Building the Future Global, Councillor of the WFC.

Dr Michelle Maloney

Earth lawyer and advocate. Co-Founder & Director of the Australian Earth Laws Alliance, Director, Future Dreaming; Director, Ecocentrx.

Maria Mercedez Sanchez

Coordinator of the UN Harmony with Nature Programme (2009–2024).

Meet the Team

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Senior Programme Officer and Research Team Lead, WFPA 2025

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Michelle Braun
Policy Researcher WFPA 2025

Alexandra Wandel
Line Manager, WFPA 2025, until March 2025

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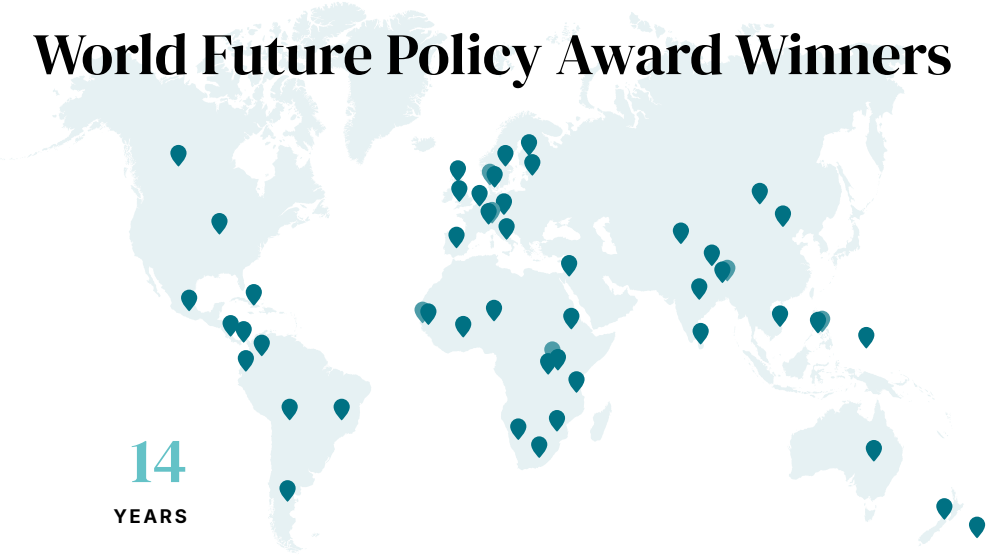

14
YEARS

45
COUNTRIES

7
INTERNATIONAL AWARDS

84
AWARDED POLICIES

Since its inception, the World Future Policy Award has celebrated and elevated the world's top policies, spotlighting innovative, impactful solutions to global challenges.

Our Award has addressed critical and diverse areas, including:

- ✓ Environmental protection
- ✓ Biodiversity
- ✓ Food security
- ✓ Disarmament
- ✓ Ocean and forest conservation
- ✓ Women's and children's rights
- ✓ Desertification
- ✓ Agroecology
- ✓ Protection from hazardous chemicals and toxins
- ✓ Peace and Future Generations

The upcoming 2027 World Future Policy Award is dedicated to policies that forster **Education for Sustainable Development in cities and communities and Future Generations**.

For more on past Awards, visit: worldfuturecouncil.org/world-future-policy-award

7 Principles for Future-Just Lawmaking

In our interviews and evaluations, we used the World Future Council's **Future Policy Award Evaluation Framework**, based on the **7 Principles for Future-Just Lawmaking**.

This framework, derived from the 2002 Delhi Declaration on Sustainable Development Law adopted by 192 states at the World Summit on Sustainable Development, offers a unique methodology for assessing sustainable policy practices.

The Seven Principles address the interconnected nature of current challenges and help avoid unintended consequences and inconsistencies in policymaking.

1. The duty to ensure the role as guardians of natural resources
2. Equity and eradication of poverty
3. Precautionary approach to human health and wellbeing of all species, nature and ecosystems
4. Public participation, access to information and justice
5. Good governance and human security
6. Integration and interrelationship
7. Common but differentiated responsibilities

WFPA EVALUATION PROCESS

In addition to extensive research, we conducted interviews with experts from various fields using policy narrative inquiry and the seven principles framework. A total of **28 expert interviews** were conducted for the 2025 WFPA. For each pre-selected policy, we carried out in-depth interviews averaging 90 to 120 minutes with at least three key informants:

- **Policy Maker Informants:** Provided insights from the perspective of the government or organisation responsible for the policy, offering knowledge of its origins, intentions, and implementation.
- **Civil Society Informants:** Assessed the policy's impact on the affected community, with an understanding of community needs and how effectively the policy addresses them.
- **Academic Informants:** Contributed expert analysis on the policy's technical aspects and comparative strengths or weaknesses, based on their academic credentials and peer-reviewed research.

These informants were carefully selected to offer distinct, independent, and knowledgeable perspectives, creating a strong qualitative foundation for evaluating each policy. For particularly complex policies with multiple angles and stakeholders, additional interviews were conducted to ensure a comprehensive understanding.

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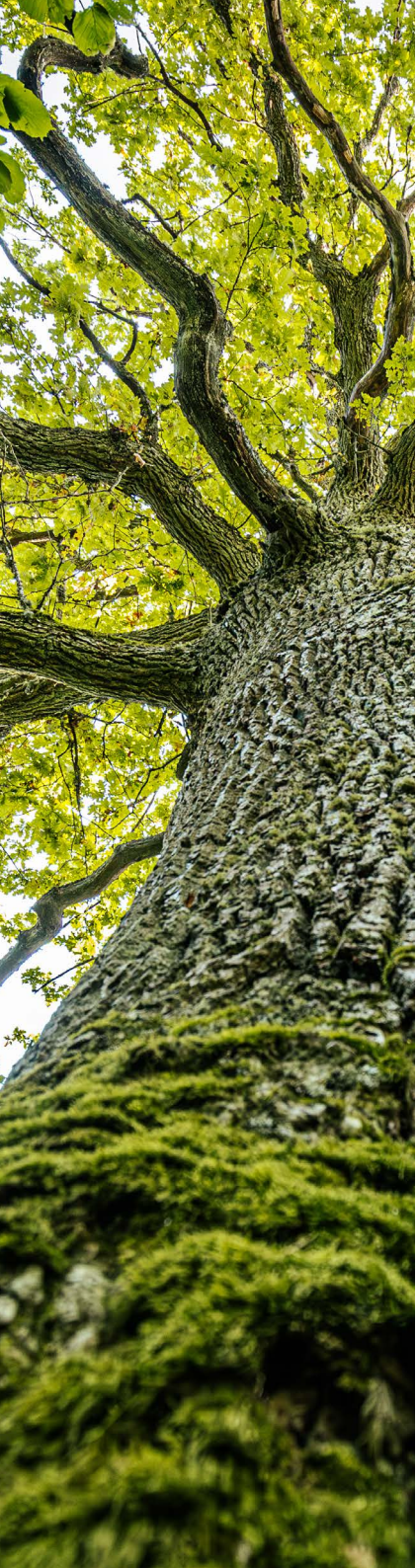

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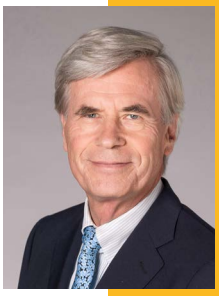
The World Future Policy Award 2025 is organised in partnership with the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) and the Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU). We extend our sincere gratitude to all our partners for their invaluable support. This Award has been made possible through the vision and generosity of the Michael Otto Foundation.

We would also like to thank the 28 experts who graciously shared their time and insights, significantly enhancing our understanding of these policies. This brochure draws largely on the World Future Policy Award 2025 Jury Report, researched and authored by Samia Kassid and the support of Augustina Schick, under the oversight of Neshan Gunasekra.

For our well-being, Nature's sake, and future generations we must embrace a new paradigm, for which we have to transform the status quo. The successful policies here show that harmony with Nature is possible when decisions follow Earth Trusteeship.

Prof. Dr. Michael Otto, Entrepreneur, Co-Founder and Honorary Councillor of the World Future Council



We cannot separate our conservation crises from our governance crises. The World Future Policy Award recognizes this critical link between decision-makers and the impacts of their decisions on the community of life. We need compassion, we need creativity, we need courage. These winning policies can help lead us forward. They are ethics in action for the future of life.

Kathryn Gwiazdon, Executive Director, Center for Environmental Ethics and Law; Chair, Ethics Specialist Group, IUCN World Commission on Environmental Law

This year's award recognizes for the first time the Rights of Nature. Nature, a living organism and complex system made up of interconnected parts and relationships reminding us that we are also a part of her, a part of one interconnected reality, Mother Earth.

Maria Mercedes Sanchez, Coordinator of the UN Harmony with Nature Programme (2009-2024)

The IPU is very proud to continue its long-standing collaboration in support of the World Future Policy Award, which this year will be focusing on the critical issue of Living in Harmony with Nature and Future Generations. Solutions to safeguard our precious Planet Earth are out there, and they should be seized with courage, solidarity and political will.

Anda Filip, Director of the Inter-Parliament Union, Division for Member Parliaments and External Relations Councillor WFC