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Day 19 – greener

As of 2020, Australia remains one of only 15 countries without the right to a healthy environment outlined in our federal laws or constitution, much less the rights of nature. This shows that as a country, Australia has not yet acknowledged how connected we are to our environment, even on a human-centric level. In 2019, the Rights of Nature and Future Generations Bill in 2019 was posed, which would provide a framework for the rights of nature to “exist, flourish, regenerate and evolve”, and recognise the rights of First Nations People to speak for and defend their ancestral lands, however, this bill has not yet been passed. I think that as a first step towards creating Rights of Nature legislation, Australia could put in place legislation protecting the rights of sacred and iconic sites, such as the Great Barrier Reef and Uluru, following a model of New Zealand, where several ecosystems such as the Whanganui River and Urewera Forest have legal rights.

However, whilst the Australian Earth Laws Alliance (AELA) is pushing for the introduction of Rights of Nature to be legislated under federal policies, the major problem is the enforcement of these policies. AELA is a national not-for-profit organisation that aims to shift towards Earth centred governance. In 2015, they represented the Great Barrier Reef in pushing for legal personhood of the Great Barrier reef in 2014, however this campaign was not furthered. Already, mining and deforestation activities regularly breach current Australian laws, which do not even acknowledge the Rights of Nature explicitly. Thus, the problem does not lie with the strength or the trajectory of these laws (however additional laws may further deter harmful activity to the environment), rather in the enforcement and the power imbalances that govern the laws and the regulation of these laws already existing.

In 2021, the Blue Mountains City Council became the first council in Australia to adopt the Rights of Nature as a foundational principle, which involved consultancy with the Australian Earth Laws Alliance. This will see the Rights of Nature featuring as a “keystone concept” in long term planning and operational activities, beginning with community workshops and dialogue with Indigenous people to explore what the Rights of Nature means for people and economy in the region.



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pgc_tahlia Recognising Rights of Nature is becoming increasingly important in order to change our human-centric ideology, rejecting the notion that our environment and its benefits are human property by recognising the rights of the environment to exist and thrive. By upholding these rights we are doing important work in ensuring that we recognise our interdependence on the environment for our existence.

The Australian Earth Laws Alliance is a not for profit organisation that aims to build systemic changes in our economy and politics in order to uphold earth centred governance.

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