

Alternet MB Remote Meeting - 9 June 2024

Draft Minutes

Present: Philip Roche (MB Chair), Allan Watt (MB Vice-Chair), Jiska van Dijk (Council Chair), Ana (Council Vice-Chair, Adriana Cliville Morato, Mart Külvik, Joan Pino, Maurice Hoffmann,, Tyler Kulfan, Marie Vandewalle,, Juliette Young, Karmen Czett, Lisa Norton

Minutes: Tyler Kulfan

The meeting of the Alternet Management Board (MB) commenced at 10:00 on 9 June 2024. Newly appointed Chair Philip Roche welcomed all those present and commenced the meeting.

Changes in Alternet Governance to Align with iNGO Regulations (Philip Roche)

Under the current structure of the Alternet Management Board, the body makeup and role is not aligned with the legal Belgian definition of an NGO management board. A smaller executive board was established at the foundation of the NGO. The proposed solution (rather than having more legal and financial responsibility than expected placed on the MB) is that the executive board becomes entitled “Management Board” in the statutes and the MB body becomes: Alternet Advisory Board.

Marie noted that the MB not only advises but also carries out activities. Joan noted that functionally the MB operates as an executive body. Allan had previously suggested “planning and advisory board.” Maurice noted that a legal Management Board has legal liability under Flemish law; which is to be avoided, as the MB did not consent to this responsibility. The structure of the MB is not to be changed; only the name, for legal reasons. Hence, the Executive Board would become the Management Board (in name). Removing the term board is advisable. Marie suggested “Steering Committee.” Steering Group was also suggested. These suggestions were met with broad support. Maurice will check if these titles would have any legal implications; the new title will need to be added to the statutes after being agreed upon. Maurice explained the liabilities under the current statutes. As the chair of the MB, Philip Roche is the ultimate responsible for Alternet. Liability only becomes an issue under circumstances of malpractice.

It is suggested that we decipher the legal definition of malpractice and what its implications for Alternet would be; likewise for suggested new titles for the MB.

Current EU Projects

No member organisations have volunteered to offer financial or administrative support for Alternet. Support for financial reporting is needed. Certain urgent matters like reporting for CO-OP4CBD cannot wait for financial support; avoiding malpractice in the interim is crucial.

Secondments have been established for Nils Bunnefeld and Brooke Wilkerson and are in process for Hari. Jiska noted that hiring a person for financial and administrative matters is possible, but hasn't been accomplished to date. Hiring a European project-related specialist (freelance consultancy) would be ideal. It should be possible for their payment to be covered by overheads. Philip suggested that EU call databases or similar NGOs might be sources of qualified candidates. It was questioned how smaller partners like Ben Delbaere handle financial matters; Maurice will ask him. Marie understands that Ben Delbaere has an accountant, and we could/should do likewise.

There is sufficient funding for hiring such personnel; the problem is identifying an appropriate and well-equipped person.

Salary scales are based on public Flemish salaries. Maurice noted that secondments, etc. are not a sustainable long-term option for contracts. We need professionals that put all of the moving parts in place and create templates, structures, and processes that we can use moving forward. Juliette noted what a massive undertaking this will be (also noting also that this is why finding internal personnel from a partner institute would have been preferable). Suggestions on accountants, consultants, financial personnel, etc. are very welcome. Revised task descriptions may be in order, and then Maurice will redistribute the task descriptions

Eclipse (Marie Vandewalle)

Because of Marie's time constraints, focus shifted to Eclipse issues. Marie noted that for Eclipse, likewise, the need for financial/administrative support is the most urgent and important matter. Acerta does not assess the contracts for their own part; it is our responsibility. The detailed Eclipse budget has already been prepared and shared with Alternet.

It was discussed whether it would be beneficial for additional personnel to serve on the MB from Eclipse. A task force on the Alternet-Eclipse relationship has been established. Philip noted that the MB is structured to have one representative per activity; having an additional representative (e.g. from the KCB) on the MB would change this structure and is thus against his preference. Someone representing specific requests, SPI activities, etc. would be an alternative. It is crucial that Alternet is not perceived as interfering in Eclipse operation, however. Allan stressed the need for representation of other projects (European projects) in the MB.

The goal of the task force is to establish unified processes and oversee distribution of overheads. A representative from the SAB was agreed upon. It was agreed that Ute Jacob could join the steering group. She is from Helmholtz Institute for Functional Marine Biodiversity (HIFMB). The other option would be Nils Bunnefeld. The more heavily involved person concerning Eclipse projects would be beneficial, and this would be Nils.

MB Tasks and Composition (Philip and MB)

An overview of MB tasks and compositions was the next agenda point, with specific tasks assigned to various MB personnel.

Combined AHIA + MB: Collaborative activities - Joan Pino moves forward with this initiative. Tyler will share the revised proposal text with a revised submission date (15 September?). The application template needs to be updated. To be ideally launched on 15 July. If the project is launched in late 2024, funds will not be distributed until 2025 which is in alignment with the allocated budget of Alternet. The council members would like to be involved in the evaluation process.

SPI activities and webinars - No major updates from Juliette Young; she retains her role.

Research infrastructure - Mark Frenzel overseeing research infrastructure initiatives, which mostly presently involves coordination with LTER and other infrastructure bodies.

Call exchange - Mart Klvik retains his role. Proactive coordination with funders; draft commenter status; and the question of distributing unpublished calls were raised. The priority should be upstream–engagement with the drafting process. Juliette mentioned the biodiversity knowledge agora and noted that it could be a part of this process. Tyler will inform institutes that the draft call is circulating and encourage internal sharing of their call interests.

A4Cap: Tyler provided an overview of the recent A4Cap assembly and ongoing work. New Alternet MB representative Karmen Czett of ESSRG was introduced.

Alternet Day 2024 at Helsinki (Tyler)

Tyler provided an update on the Alternet Day in Helsinki

- 50 persons in attendance per session, about 30/session online (will confirm from the Helsinki Univ tech support)
- Partner institutes present: RCSES/ Univ of Bucharest, ERCE, CREAM, CESAM, WENR, IGB, ESSRG, NIVA, UFZ, SYKE, INBO
- Biodiversa+ also present
- Great talks, good engagement–and good news concerning the Nature Restoration Law at its conclusion
- One speaker was a no-show
- Presentation/promotion of one Alternet activity per session. These included an overall introduction to Alternet, SPI activities (webinars, European projects, Eclipse), and Summer School + A4Cap
- Special bonus talk about the Finnish environment ministry from Eeva Furman
- Recordings have just become available

Alternet Conference 2025 (Ana)

Ana Lillebo is overseeing the 2025 conference organisation from the steering group side with support from Lisa Norton and others. She shared the draft programme and contents. The themes and title suggestions were reviewed and discussed. Ana stressed the urgency of making a decision concerning the theme/title. A scan was conducted to make sure we weren't using the same title as another similar conference. Maurice suggested a followup to Alternet's past conferences would be appropriate.

"Achieving transformative change for biodiversity" was decided upon as a title. Several of the other suggested titles could fall under this umbrella as relevant sessions. The task force will now be informed of our preference for this topic; after consulting the task force, we can publish a save the date.

Alternet Summer School (Alan)

19 speakers and 28 students have been confirmed. There was a record setting number of students registered: 116. Seven of the speakers are former students, which is a great measure of the success of the school. More regular updates to the Council would be valued. Marie stressed the importance of the meeting that was held in Namur to take stock in what has been achieved and what is needed to have a successful summer school in light of everything ahead.

Mention was made of the BioAgora summer school and BioAgora SPI pilot training. The specific niche of the Alternet Summer School versus such programs as the SPI pilot training was discussed. More motivation is needed for the pilot training. Jiska advocated that after the summer break we would push strongly on this.

Next MB meeting

A two day (noon-to-noon) doodle for an in person meeting during the last week of November will be distributed. Marie said that the Helmholtz center office will be a potential hosting site; otherwise, INBO remains an option. Jiska had the idea for a 20th anniversary event in Ghent linked to task 3.3 of BioAgora. This could be held in January/February in conjunction with the Council meeting.

The MB meeting concluded at 14:00.