

	Minutes Alternet Council meeting 11-12 February 2025
Host	Creaf, Spain Institut d'Estudis Catalans Carrer del Carme, 47 08001 Barcelona
Minutes	Tyler Kulfan

Council Participants

1. Ana Lillebo (CESAM), Council Vice-Chair
2. Philip Roche (INRAE), Steering Committee Chair
3. Mark Frenzel (UFZ)
4. Jomme Desair (INBO)
5. Joan Pino (Creaf)
6. Ben Delbaere (DC)
7. Sibylle Schroer (IGB)
8. Lukas Egarter Vigl (Eurac)
9. Clara Veerkamp (PBL)
10. Thierry Claquet (INRAE)
11. Adriana Cliville Morato (Creaf)

Online

12. Maurice Hoffmann, MB Treasurer
13. Allan Watt, Steering Committee Vice-Chair (UK-CEH)
14. Johannes Peterseil (EAA)
15. Eeva Primmer (Syke)
16. Alison Hester (Hutton)
17. Sindre Langaas (NIVA)
18. Davide Geneletti (DICAM)
19. Jorgen Rosvold (NINA)
20. Lisa Norton (UK-CEH)
21. Robert Kanka (ILE-SAS)
22. Eszter Kelemen (ESSRG)
23. Nicolas Titeux (LIST)
24. Mihai Adamescu (Unibuc)

- 25. Kinga Krauze (ERCE)
- 26. Mart Külvik (IAES)
- 27. Juliette Young (INRAE)
- 28. Chris Short (CCRI)
- 29. Jacques Berlo (Peiresc)
- 30. Nicolas Dendoncker (ILEE)
- 31. Riikka Paloniemi (Syke)
- 32. Matthew Reed (CCRI)
- 33. Marie Vandewalle (UFZ)
- 34. Karmen Czett (ESSRG)

Also present: Fiona Nevzati (online), Alicia Perrez-Poro (in-person)

Day 1: Tuesday 11 February 2025

1. INFO (Ana Lillebo): Welcome and start meeting – info

Ana welcomed all those present in person and online and thanked CREAM for hosting the 2025 Council meeting in Barcelona.

2. DECI (Ana Lillebo): Approval of the agenda and reminder of the voting rules according to the statutes [Link to doc00](#)

The agenda for the 2025 Council meeting was presented; the agenda was unanimously approved.

3. INFO: Roundtable intros NFO/DISC/DECI (MB): withdrawal of SLU, issue of non-paying members

Maurice informed the Council that SLU (Sweden), a member institute since 2004, is withdrawing its membership in Alternet. A change of governance made continued membership strictly impossible; it was noted that Ulf Grandin did everything in his power to retain membership. The new governance was not aware of Alternet, as the entire institute was a partner but only a small group was actively involved in Alternet. It was suggested to Ulf that this smaller group could someday rejoin Alternet, but this option was not chosen .

4. DECI (Ana Lillebo): Minutes of the council meeting of Feb 2024 [Link to the minutes Doc01](#)

The minutes of the 2024 Council meeting were presented. They were unanimously approved and will be published on the Alternet website.

5. INFO (Ana Lillebo, Philip Roche): Steering Committee minutes of the different meetings in 2024 - [Link to minutes 1](#); [Link to minutes 2](#)

The minutes of the two most recent steering committee meetings were presented for review; these minutes were shared with Council for informational purposes.

6. DECI (Maurice Hoffmann): Official approval of new statutes Link to DOC (new Articles of Association); Link to DOC (present statutes of 20/08/2020)

The new statutes were presented by Maurice Hoffmann at a pre-meeting of the Council at 29 January 2025. They were reviewed by the Council and subsequently revised. The revised text was presented again to all those present by Maurice.

Jomme questioned the change of address, and it was noted that the change of address will be made official upon the approval of the new statutes. Ben Delbaere noted an incorrect email address listed, which will be adjusted.

With sufficient numbers present for quorum, the Council approved the new articles of association. Maurice was asked to take the necessary steps with the notary in Brussels to have the adjusted statutes published in the Belgian Gazette, making them the new legal statutes.

7. DECI (MB): appointment of Secretariat of Management Board based on nominations received from Council

The appointment of a secretariat for the MB was discussed, noting that it could not be officially fulfilled by Tyler or any of the present members of the MB. It was noted by Maurice that the new position is to strengthen and supplement, not replace, the work of Tyler. A nomination for Jomme Desair was made by Ben Delbaere, but no commitments were made. The position remains open and additional nominations are welcome. It is not required that members of the MB be members of Alternet institutes.

8. DECI (MB): New composition of MB

The current composition of the MB includes: Philip Roche (Chair), Jiska van Dijk, Allan Watt, Ana Lillebo, and Maurice Hoffmann (treasurer). Awaiting an additional member (Secretary) this composition was temporarily approved.

9. DECI (MB): Current Chair council & Chair Management Board till Feb 2027.

The appointment of Council Chair Jiska van Dijk and Management Board Chair Philip Roche until February 2027 were confirmed. Given the preferences mentioned in the adjusted statutes, council is aware that preferably a new chair of both council and MB should be decided upon at the annual council meeting of February 2027 at the latest.

10. INFO (MB): recruitment of financial administrative assistant (0,2 fte, financial reporting and contracts)

Maurice explained the need for financial administrative assistance to work on reporting and contracts. This position can be funded through the overheads of EU projects in which Alternet and Eklipse are involved. There has been no success to date in recruiting a contributor internally from a partner institute; previous inquiries with institutes and external companies did not result in viable options. In the absence of support, Maurice, Jiska, and Marie Vandewalle have been responsible for financial and administrative tasks of this nature.

Recruitment efforts will continue and additional internal promotion of this vacancy by partners is greatly appreciated.

11. DECI (Philip Roche): Approval of all members of SC

The current composition of the Steering Committee was raised for approval. Among the proposed changes is the withdrawal of Maurice Hoffmann from his role representing science seminars; and the proposed addition of Sibylle Schroer to represent Alternet's participation in European projects. Mark Frenzel additionally noted that he will be retiring at the end of 2025 and will seek to find a new SC member to replace him for the activity of research infrastructure.

The proposed composition was approved. Candidates for representation of the aforementioned activities in the SC are welcomed.

12. DISC/DECI/INFO (Ana Lillebo): Follow-up of the minutes of Feb 2024, other than Alternet internal activities and EU-projects

A). Call Exchange commenting on draft work programmes of DG RTD (HEurope) and other work programmes (Biodiv+) - how to organize and position Alternet - Mart Külvik & Riikka Paloniemi

The proactive coordination of Alternet with funders and status as a commenter on draft calls was proposed at last year's Council meeting. Eeva Primmer noted that Alternet could be active in identifying initiatives/calls that could be added to draft agendas.

Being involved in the FP10 programme structure negotiations is presently possible. The current Horizon Europe funding programme potentially has room for additional topics, and Eeva recommends that Alternet considers valuable additional topics over the course of the present Council meeting. The PEER partnership is composing an opinion on FP10. How Alternet could also have an impact on FP10 was considered; and Maurice asked if it would be possible for PEER to share what they have composed to date with Alternet to possibly co-sign. Eeva suggested it would be possible. Thierry recommended that Alternet presents the main ways it wishes to contribute; Ben encouraged Alternet to take up a clear position, jointly alongside PEER. Mart recommended that a task force be assembled and that a clear plan forward be outlined over the course of the Council meeting.

Related resource:

<https://www.peer.eu/news/detail/peers-position-paper-on-the-framework-programme-for-research-and-innovation-fp10>

Lisa Norton noted that the PEER statement is fairly straightforward and it should be attainable for Alternet to make something similar.

B). Collaboration with 3rd parties

This subject was interlinked with the above discussion.

C). Webpage in-kind contributions (Tyler Kulfan)

Tyler shared the draft webpage, which displays in-kind contributions for the public. This initiative to publicize in-kind contributions visibly was requested at the 2024 Council meeting. Internally, it was suggested by Ana that it would be valuable to share the person-months being provided, by rough estimation. Allan noted the in-kind contributions of those from outside the network, including among the Summer School organisation; Jomme noted likewise for the A4Cap network. Eeva recommended that external contributors be recognized in a different way. Allan suggested highlighting individuals. All are encouraged to share their suggestions for in-kind contributions to recognize with Tyler.

13. INFO (Maurice Hoffmann): Financial overview 2024 - link to overview DOC, and DOC with details (Maurice)

Maurice presented his overview of the Alternet budget and accounts, including incomes, expenditures, internal activities, and external projects. The overall financial situation of Alternet was presented.

Mark Frenzel noted that without an increase of membership fees, income will not grow to keep up with the inflation of expenses for Alternet activities. Instead, Alternet is relying on external income from European projects and Biodiversa+, which supports the Summer School and A4Cap. Other income sources include registration fees for the Summer Schools and conferences. There was a reminder of the importance of timely payment of membership fees. Jomme commented on the financial reporting for BioAgora, and noted the possibility to use project overheads for some of Alternet's expenses. Johannes Peterseil commented on the VAT based on reverse charge. To his knowledge that is not overhead, but accounted for as other direct costs (net costs + reverse charge); and as such should clearly be on the external projects. In his opinion, that is in line with the Horizon Europe financial regulations.

It was discussed that some activities are bringing in income and thus sponsoring other activities; but others disagreed and noted that all activities are sponsored by Alternet. The importance of respecting terms of agreement with Biodiversa+ and other funders was noted by Jomme Desair.

14. DECI (Maurice Hoffmann): Approval of the annual financial overview 2024

The council approved the financial overview of 2024.

15. DECI (MB): retention of membership fee, in-kind contributions

This agenda point was recommended to be moved to the budget discussion and decision agenda point.

16. INFO/DISC (Brooke Wilkerson, Fiona Nevzati): COOP4CBD, BioAgora, EcoReady, Restoreid - presentations and positioning Alternet

New Alternet employee Fiona Nevzati presented on Alternet's role in CO-OP4CBD and BioAgora; and Marie Vandewalle presented on the progress of two projects that Alternet is involved in via Eklipse: EcoReady and Restoreid. The deliverables and milestones that have been achieved in these projects to date were shared with the Council.

Ana Lillebo noted that Alternet's engagement with research prioritization could be an element of BioAgora task 3.3. Marie noted that BioAgora is shaping the future of biodiversity research, in that all future calls involving biodiversity are to be associated with BioAgora. Eeva noted the importance of establishing the role of Alternet in the future science service.

17. INFO/DISC (Ben Delbaere): Alternet and the EU Science Service for biodiversity [Link to half page intro](#)

Ben presented on the BioAgora project, summarizing its aims and progress toward developing a scientific pillar for the Knowledge Centre for Biodiversity. He discussed the project's goal of facilitating access to scientific knowledge for policymaking and highlighted Alternet's long-standing involvement in supporting biodiversity policy. He also initiated a discussion about the sustainability of the BioAgora science service after the project's conclusion (30JUN2027).

The science service will have a governance structure, an interactive web platform, and a business plan, focusing on three key functions: transformative change, supporting thematic networks (the "biodiversity knowledge agora"), and answering policy requests. A governance model is under development, featuring an operative body, a transformative change committee, and an answering request management team.

A Mentimeter poll was used to gauge interest in the science service from different perspectives (Alternet as a whole, individual institutes, and individual experts). Responses highlighted factors such as funding, networking opportunities, and the potential to influence policy. The need for sustainable funding for the science service beyond the Bioagora project's lifespan was emphasised and a variety of challenges and potential uses for the science service were discussed. The results of the Mentimeter poll are to be distributed to the Council.

18. DISC (Philip): Alternet's positioning and niche/strategy Alternet - for reflection by end of the day

Philip introduced the subject of establishing Alternet's positioning and niche/strategy and began an open discussion. Two model options were presented by Philip: an EU project-centric model; and a member-driven research network model. The first would maintain and expand participation in major EU research projects, accepting the associated management complexity and resource requirements in exchange for broader funding opportunities and European-level engagement. The second would entail returning to a self-sustaining network model, primarily funded by member contributions and focusing resources on core research priorities identified by network members.

Mark voiced support for option 1, emphasising that the issue is one of critical mass and impact. Joan Pino agreed, stating that it is critical for increasing Alternet's influence at the European level—but stressed that Alternet should be extremely selective about the projects it joins. Eeva stated that we should constantly reassess Alternet's identity, mission, and consequential positioning. Dynamic ways of renewing Alternet is essential. Kinga Krauze advocated for a mixed funding model for Alternet, combining project funding with self-sustaining capacity to maintain independence and pursue goals beyond project requirements. Mihai noted that if Alternet pursues option 2, it needs to be more active and have a strong say in many socio-ecological aspects. Chris Short stated that some projects

are okay, but we should not become entirely dependent—and stressed that institutes need to fund Alternet. Jomme stated that the secretariat should be independently funded so that Alternet does not fail if project funding dries up. Maurice noted that there seems to be general consensus for a mixed model, and noted that support is needed to proceed so as not to remain dependent upon the same in-kind contributors.

The process in which Alternet participates in EU projects was addressed. Awareness of the consequences of any chosen scenario needs to be understood and the process for moving forward should be outlined. Alison suggested that we should clarify our needs pertaining to projects (as a network, as well as each individual partner institute) and begin moving proactively instead of reactively. Jomme recommended we survey ourselves about priorities and return to this subject at the Alternet Conference in Aveiro; he also noted that the 20th anniversary of Alternet is a great opportunity to reinvent ourselves. Ideas should be collected from members, within the framework of the statutes. This can be followed by an online in-between meeting and then an in-person one at CESAM. Maurice suggested a joint discussion of the MB and SC. Mart stated that another strategic element to be discussed and devised could be Alternet's Membership Policy. Sindre Langaas said we should also consider the risk aspect: what if a project with Alternet as partner is deemed mismanaged by the funding agency and resources requested returned—how will this be resolved within Alternet? Lisa advocated for regular (annual) revisitation of the purpose and identity of Alternet. Alison said that how we approach projects (and all activities) should be in a manner that is greater than the sum of Alternet's parts; as a synergistic network rather than just a group of individual organisations.

End of Day 1. Dinner was enjoyed at a local Catalan restaurant.

Day 2: Wednesday 12 February 2025

19. INFO: Alternet internal activities 2024 - reporting back - and proposals for activities 2025 with links to the docs received from Steering committee

- Running secretariat - Tyler Kulfan

Tyler discussed the operation of the secretariat, the executive actions of which are integrated into all other activities of Alternet. It was noted that Tyler is now working part-time and has an additional part-time job, reducing his Alternet capacity to the internal activities (which was formerly full-time, including support of the external projects). He would be happy to dedicate his time to Alternet full-time if secretariat funding were to at any point allow.

- Gender equality plan - Riikka Paloniemi

Riikka presented the updated draft gender equality plan that she has composed for Alternet, with input based on the plans of several partner institutes.

Eeva Primmer suggested that a quick-glance summary at the beginning of the plan would be valuable. She asked if all elements of the plan could be implemented immediately. Eszter noted that it could be important to include all those working for Alternet (not only as employees but in-kind and as volunteers) within the scope of the plan. Maurice asked if the plan applies to partner institutes and institutes with which we

have secondments. Eeva questioned who is responsive to prospective issues and suggested it should be the chair. She also noted that there should be a plan for dealing with harassment from outsiders. Sibylle recommended putting concrete actions in place that promote underrepresented demographics.

- **MoC eLTER-Alternet - Mark Frenzel**

Mark Frenzel presented on the draft MoC (Memorandum of Cooperation) between eLTER and Alternet. LTER Europe was born out of ALTER-Net 1. It is still managed by Michael Mirtl; in 2018 it took up a central role in the ESFRI roadmap.

The proposed MoC is already drafted. Presently, we need a few council members from Alternet and eLTER participants willing to review the MoC and provide comments. Joan Pino, Lisa Norton, Robert Kanka, and Thierry Cliquet volunteered to contribute to the finalisation of this MoC; Eeva also volunteered a contributor from Syke.

- **Communications - Adriana Cliville Morato and Tyler Kulfan**

Adriana presented on the 2025 proposed communications budget; the total requested amount is 4,000 euros, which represents a significant reduction from the previous year's allocated budget. Adriana also provided an overview of new activities for 2025, including the new internal newsletter, social media editorial calendar, IT support (including the migration from Outlook accounts to Gmail), continued 20th anniversary activities, and the transition to BlueSky from Twitter. Jomme requested newsletter subscription numbers from INBO.

- **Science Lectures - new member needed or within current Steering Committee members? - Maurice Hoffmann, Philip Roche**

The Science Lectures activity was originally proposed by Maurice, who can no longer take the lead on this initiative. If the initiative is still of interest to be developed, a new representative to take the lead will be needed. Eeva suggested turnover and the inclusion of new, energetic persons would be valuable. The conference is suggested as a deadline to identify a new representative.

- **Collaborative actions - Joan Pino**

Joan Pino reviewed the collaborative actions (Alternet Collaborative Projects) activity, which was introduced as a merged initiative that combined the AHIA and MSR activities. The first call for proposals was released in December 2024 and concluded on 1 February 2025. The call yielded only one qualifying proposal, led by INBO and WENR. A selection committee is now needed to review the submitted proposal(s). Alison and Clara volunteer, alongside Joan.

- **Summer School - Allan Watt**

The 2024 Alternet Summer School was the 18th summer school programme. A planning meeting of the Summer School contributors was also held in March 2024 in Namur, Belgium.

The 2024 school included 27 students, selected from 110 applicants (a new record). A budget of 20k is requested for the 2025 Alternet Summer School, assuming Biodiversa+ continues with its 12k support. Provisional approval for the organisation of the 2026 summer school is likewise requested. In-kind contribution of conveners and secretariat is also proposed. No increase to the participation cost (1,200 euros) is foreseen, and 4-6 partial support grants would be available. He noted that the long programme is essential for full immersion.

Clara noted the high interest in the summer school from PBL and asked if there is a hard limit on the number of students from one institute. Allan noted that two is a soft limit; and he encouraged applications from more Alternet partner institutes.

- **A4Cap Network - Karmen Czett**

Karmen Czett of ESSRG presented on the A4Cap activity, which has ramped up significantly since its official recognition at the 2024 Council meeting. Network activities in 2024 included the annual capacity-building assembly, an ECR talk at Alternet Day in Helsinki, orientation for new alumni, a logo design activity, joint talk with YESS at ESP, and the commencement of a new research initiative on transdisciplinary education and the evolution of biodiversity research. Upcoming activities for 2025 include contribution to the Aveiro Conference, the annual capacity building assembly, further advancement of the research project and publication, further outreach to Alternet network ECRs, further connection with the BioAgora ECRN network, online trainings hosted by Biodiversa+, and welcoming of 2025 Summer School alumni.

The proposed budget was presented; 5k in new funding is requested for 2025 with the expressed intention of Biodiversa+ being to match this amount for a total operating budget of 10k. A provisional approval is requested to begin organisation of the 2026 A4Cap assembly, in line with the annual provisional approval of the Summer School. Alison requested the compilation of an outreach strategy and suggested that the network name is unclear. Ben commented that this network is a lifeline for the future of Alternet.

- **SPI webinars - Juliette Young**

Juliette Young summarized the SPI seminar series, including past events, attendance numbers, and future plans. She emphasized the series' ease of participation and low cost. An IGB seminar is proposed for 2025 to present the work of the Leibniz Network "Systemic Sustainability."

Mark Frenzel noted a missing seminar recording. Eeva suggested updating the website with conference keynote recordings, pending consent from speakers. Eszter Kelemen suggested that the webinars could focus on ongoing projects. Eeva noted that an idea for a webinar at some point in the future would be machine learning in biodiversity mapping or on applying modern monitoring methods.

- **Eclipse - Marie Vandewalle**

Marie presented a comprehensive overview of Eclipse's recent activities, reports, and milestones, emphasising the robust achievements of Eclipse (which is an autonomous mechanism managed by Alternet). There was no proposal—the one Eclipse-related request was for a clear statement on the availability of budget from overheads in order to

cover Eklipse recurrent costs and to be able to plan events and activities.

Mark questioned the use of AI to answer requests. An assessment of this potential was recently conducted concerning evidence reports, and it was concluded that it could help with reducing associated time and costs. Ana suggested that an in person meeting between Alternet and Eklipse representatives concerning integration would be valuable and raised the Aveiro conference or a sooner in-between meeting as options. Access to Eklipse's presentations of activities was requested.

Concerning the clear budget statement and the access to overheads, Ana suggested that the agreement should be finalized first and that an in-person meeting should be prioritised as soon as possible in order to move forward and enable the release of funds with a common agreement. It was reminded that a proposition by Alternet concerning interrelations was sent to the Eklipse Management Body, but so far this was not replied to. It was advised that Eklipse would reply to this proposal before finalizing such an agreement

- **Conference - Lisa Norton, with Ana Lillebo, Tyler Kulfan**

Ana presented an overview of the Alternet Day in Helsinki conference day, which dealt with the subject of nature restoration. A request for the recordings of the event to be uploaded to the Alternet website was made. Eeva noted that all conference and event materials and resources should be made available electronically; and also emphasised the importance of using these events as opportunities for Alternet community-building, with side events and intentional bonding time.

An overview of the state of the art of the 2025 conference organisation was provided by Ana and Tyler. The conference is to be self-sustaining; all organisers, contributors, and non-keynote speakers are to pay for attendance. A Council meeting could be held on either Tuesday morning or Friday afternoon, and an anniversary event is intended for Monday afternoon. It is requested that Council members mobilise their institutes to register and respond to the ongoing call for abstracts.

- Council event - 20th Anniversary (15 minutes) - Ana Lillebo, Philip Roche, Tyler Kulfan

It was decided to merge budget needs for a 20th Anniversary side-event at the Alternet Conference with a small budget for Conference activities (2k). Volunteers to lead an anniversary event working group were requested.

- Call exchange (15 minutes) doc1, doc2 - Mart Külvik

Not discussed.

20. Approval of proposed activities 2025 and budget allocations

The proposed budget for 2025 was presented by Philip Roche:

-A4Cap 5k plus rollover amount from 2024

-Communications: 4k

-ACP: 10k, to be raised to 20k under the condition that the total of allocated budget would

not endanger the earlier (3 FEB 2022) agreed minimum capital of Alternet of 80.000 €)

- Summer School: 20k
- Conference and side-event: 2k
- Secretariat: 30k
- Seat costs: 2k
- Legal advice: 5k
- External financial and administrative support: 1k
- MB-SC meetings: 5k

Expected membership fee income: 73k.

Resulting balance: -19k

Individual items of the budget were discussed. In the case that the conference is not self-sustaining, Alternet will be responsible for the costs. The rollover of Biodiversa+ funding for A4Cap was discussed. The amount spent on prepayment will be drawn from last year's allocation, and a new allocation of 5k for 2025 will be made.

The Council was questioned concerning the launch of a new ACP call in 2025. Review of the received proposals will commence. Ben suggested that only 10k should be allocated for ACP and no new call should be launched. Alison noted that the call was released around the holidays and that the apparent lack of interest might be due to this; and that the initiative should not be discarded on this basis. A minimum required number of proposals received was discussed.

No suggestion to increase membership fees was introduced.

Jomme strongly encouraged inclusion of flexible funding available from projects in the Alternet budget. He encouraged spending freely in accordance with our grant agreement(s). It was recommended by Philip and Maurice that the budget be based on membership incomes rather than project incomes [until an overhead policy is established](#). Eeva noted that secretariat costs are management costs, and therefore within the scope of overheads.

26 Council members remained at the time of budget discussion, enabling sufficient quorum for budget approval. The Council approved the proposed 2025 budget. The Council decided to not increase the membership fee amounts and in-kind contributions policy for 2025.

21. Any other business (Ana Lillebo)

Ben Delbaere proposed the appointment of Jomme to the MB as secretariat. Jomme encouraged contribution and engagement from Alternet partners with his proposed conference session.

22. Next meeting and closing (Ana Lillebo)

Ana thanked all those present for their participation and engagement and the CREA hosts for their hospitality and facilities. The following meeting will be held in Aveiro, on the morning of Tuesday, May 13th 2025.

The meeting concluded at 13:10.