

Agenda: Alternet Steering Committee Meeting 2025

8-9 December 2025

Location: Maison Irène et Frédéric Joliot-Curie, 100 Rue du trône, Brussels

(<https://www.maison-joliot-curie.eu/>)

Day 1 (8 December)

13:00 – 17:30

Present (in-person): Philip Roche (Chair), Allan Watt (Vice Chair), Uta Fritsch, Maurice Hoffmann, Joan Pino, Ana Lillebo, Mart Kulvik, Lisa Norton, Sibylle Schroer, Karmen Czett, Tyler Kulfan, Mark Frenzel

Online: Jiska van Dijk, Marie Vandewalle, Fiona Nevzati

1. **Welcome** (Philip)

Chair Philip Roche welcomed all those present to INRAE's Brussels office and commenced the 2025 Alternet SC meeting. A short tour de table was presented.

2. **Acceptance of agenda; AOB inquiry** (Philip)

The option for requests to alter or adjust the agenda was offered; none were made.

3. **Update on Alternet Memberships**

SLU has withdrawn its membership; HUN-REN wishes to officially withdraw; Archipelagos has not been paying but has not requested official withdrawal. Council will be informed about the withdrawal of HUN-REN during the Council meeting in February. New members are preferably accepted by Council prior to the Council meeting to allow the new members to join and introduce their institute.

GESBIO (Cordoba, Spain) has officially been voted in as Alternet's newest member institute following the participation of one of its researchers in the Summer School and A4Cap activities. Another 2025 alum has expressed interest on behalf of the Technical University of Istanbul and Secretariat Tyler Kulfan has met with its representatives to discuss candidacy; an official application is pending. Likewise, Tyler has met with representatives from Pensoft who wish to join Alternet and provide in-kind technical/communications support in lieu of an annual fee. Serving as the new communications SC rep and hosting the Alternet website were suggested as in-kind service options.

It was stated that fee payment for members is a requirement of the statutes. The added value of Pensoft's membership was stressed. A reduced fee was suggested; however, the issues associated with in-kind replacing membership fees was noted, as many institutes are contributing a great deal of in-kind. The importance of migrating the website from CREAM was noted. The unique status of Pensoft's profile (as a company, etc.) was also discussed.

There should be assurance that they would deliver the service that CREAM has provided and Alternet (and potentially Eclipse, by association) will have the services it needs. A January meeting will be set up with Pensoft, the secretariat, members of the MB, and CREAM personnel.

4. Governance and coordination

4.1. Support contract NINA for Alternet EU projects

Annette from NINA is helping with administrative financial support (contract is from 01.10.2025 - 01.10.2026): legal contracts, working with Maurice on the budget, etc. As decided before half of the costs is for Alternet (2 EU projects) and half for Eclipse (2 EU projects). This constitutes an effective but expensive solution. Timely submission of new (and missing) timesheets and reimbursement requests is essential. It is important for her/Maurice to also be informed beforehand of upcoming expenses so that Maurice can anticipate budgeting allocations. It was noted that this service is expensive with Anette being employed by a Scandinavian institute, but absolutely necessary. Specific templates for project expenses (meeting/conference attendance etc) are available and to be used. There is also a detailed time sheet template available which is used by the 5 persons working on the different EU projects.

4.2. Budget

Maurice presented a brief overview of the allocations and expenditures for Alternet's internal budget and its individual activities. It was noted that two ACP project calls were released, but no expenses have been made by any ACP project to date. An overview of the budget and expenses related to Alternet and Eclipse's European projects was subsequently delivered. The cost of Anette's service is € 32.500,00 + 21% VAT obligation in Belgium annually for a yearly contract (tot. € 39.325,00). Her contract is from 01.10.2025-01.10.2026

5. Adriana Resignation

Adriana announced her resignation after five years of working with Alternet in-kind on behalf of CREAM. Adriana has represented Alternet's communications; she kindly offered to help support the transition of communications management from CREAM to Pensoft or whichever SC representative/institute supports Alternet's communications in the future.

6. Expectations for the next Alternet Council meeting - Jiska

Decisions of the Council regarding Alternet activities were reviewed by Jiska (Council Chair). Pending issues include the status of in-kind contributions promotion, the gender equality plan, science lectures, SPI webinars, and Eclipse. It was determined at the in-between Council meeting in Aveiro that the SC should oversee the redefinition of Alternet's mission. A strong focus on SPIs; strong role in SSBD; attractiveness to its members and more inclusion of partner colleagues; strong visibility and strong impact; and collaboration among ourselves and with other networks are key themes that were highlighted for this redefinition. Alternet is to be influential, proactive, reflective, and trustworthy.

Oversight of daily management remains with the Management Board; this includes management of 0.2 FTE financial admin assistant (as agreed upon by the Council, Contract Alternet-NINA for Anette) and Secretariat Tyler (freelance contract, 0.6fte). Uta Fritsch is now serving as the secretary of the MB (in-kind from Eurac).

Ways to make the council more engaged were discussed. Different representatives for engagement with different activities (e.g. communications, call exchange) rather than just a single engaged council member is important. In-person engagement was also stressed. Engagement of particular members for particular tasks; per task agendas could be compiled. It was suggested that each Council member could be expected to report on their activity/engagement/promotion throughout the year. Explicit followup to task force volunteers should be made; expectations should be proactively outlined when tasks are distributed and committees are formed.

7. Reporting on Alternet actions 2025 – Steering Committee, presented by respective activity representatives

7.1. Conference

Lisa Norton briefly reported on the successes of the Aveiro conference; it was noted that there were no associated costs, thanks to the generous hosting support of CESAM. Hosts and locations for the next conference need to be identified asap, and there is a desire for the 2027 location to be in central/eastern Europe. Mihai Adamescu has suggested Bucharest as a potential location. Allocations for organisation budget and expenditures will need to be decided upon.

7.2. Summer School

Allan gave his overview of the students, speakers, tutors, and conveners that were part of the 2025 Alternet Summer School. New speakers, tutors, etc. were noted, as were changes to (and improvements of) the Peyresq accommodations by Gabrielle Auger and the Peiresc Foundation. This year was rated as the 2nd best summer school ever according to feedback surveys. The use of trains is encouraged; but, as such, speaker travel costs are higher than in the past. The need to make sure participation of Alternet partner students is prioritised was noted. Recommendation letters are no longer submitted but letters of acknowledgement would be of value (including to flag the status of Alternet students). Marie gave a presentation to introduce the students to Alternet at the start of the Summer School; since the Summer school, the institutes of two students have initiated applications for membership, demonstrating that promotional efforts were successful.

As always, the convener group included:

- **Eurac:** Uta Fritsch
- **ILEE (UNamur):** Nicolas Dendoncker

- **INRAE:** Emilie Crouzat
- **UK-CEH:** Allan Watt
- **UFZ:** Marie Vandewalle
- **NORCE:** Brooke Wilkerson

2025 tutors included Jomme Desair (INBO) and Carla Washbourne (University of Warwick).

In addition to financial support amounting to 12k euros, Biodiversa+ paid for the participation of eight students.

7.3. Collaborative activities

Joan presented on the Alternet Collaborative Projects activity. A call was launched at the start of the year and a successful proposal from INBO was selected. A second call recently concluded, with five high-quality proposals; a selection committee has not yet been finalised. Joan suggested that staff costs could be included in ACP-eligible costs, but could nevertheless be considered as a criteria subject to scoring. A proposal should be made to the Council on revision of the call guidelines concerning personnel costs.

7.4. A4Cap

Karmen Czett presented on the activities of the A4Cap ECR and alumni network in 2025 and its intended activities in 2026. In the past year, A4Cap continued to make progress on its joint research on the evolution of biodiversity research and transdisciplinary education, organised a related session (with 8 organisers and 16+ alumni attendees) at the Alternet Conference, hosted its 4th capacity building assembly in Spa, Belgium, and held a general orientation meeting in November. It also saw the launch of new activity groups (e.g. support network), outreach to Alternet partner ERCs (3 have participated in assemblies to date), and new promotional strategies, including a presentation at Peyresq. It was noted that new and prospective Alternet partner institutes were brought into the network through A4Cap engagement, including Eurac, GESBIO, and potentially University of Istanbul. In the next year, a winter roundtable will be held, the annual assembly will be organised, and the research project will conclude pending publication. A budget of 5k from Alternet and 5k from Biodiversa+ is requested. It was noted by Jiska that PEER wants to launch an ECR network, which should be in collaboration with Alternet.

7.5. Communication

As Adriana is departing, Tyler shared an overview of 2025 communications progress. This included:

- Transition from Microsoft Outlook to Gmail
- Creation of Alternet Google Workspace
- Introduction of Alternet Internal Newsletter
- Merging of mailing list audiences

- 4 standard seasonal newsletters
- 4 internal newsletters
- 22 news stories - Updates
- Average of 2-3 social media posts weekly on four platforms (FB, BlueSky, LinkedIn, Instagram) Sharing of cloud file ownership, especially of personnel that are retiring, etc.

Activities planned for 2026 include the development of a members-only intranet on the Alternet website, the potential expansion of the internal newsletter audience, the revision of printed promotional materials, and the revision of the Alternet partners map. Most importantly, it will see the communications activity represented by a new person, potentially from Pensoft, if they are accepted as Alternet's new partner institute. Pensoft would likely host the Alternet website, if they are accepted. Mark Frenzel noted the importance of personnel sharing their personally owned data/files into a general storage with shared ownership before departing from Alternet or returning.

7.6. Call exchange

Sibylle shared an overview of the one-pager prepared by herself and Tyler on a strategy for the effective future use of the Alternet Call Exchange. It was stated that the Call Exchange should be used to proactively explore and identify calls of broad interest to the Alternet community, wherein Alternet could potentially lead, co-lead, or be a partner. Suggestions for potential modes of use were presented for discussion, along with improvements and changes to be made. Maurice stressed the importance of reconsidering Alternet's means of being involved in European projects—e.g. by prioritising employee secondments with Alternet partner institutes, as long as this is indicated in the proposal and GA (i.e. ensuring enough financial budget to cover such structure).

Fiona Nevzati then presented on the BioAgora project and Alternet's place within the Bio Knowledge Agora (BioAgora). Alternet's role is to provide expert networks and capacity building in the SPIs. She likewise presented on the progress and upcoming tasks of Alternet within CO-OP4CBD.

7.7. SPI

There has been no activity in the Alternet SPI webinar activity since September 2024, when the most recent webinar was delivered by CESAM. There is still interest in a webinar from IGB to present on sustainability. It was noted that this is a valuable and cost-free activity and that there is interest to revive and revitalize it; A4Cap was pointed to as a natural network to take over the operation of Alternet webinar/seminars, as similar seminars are organised and presented annually at A4Cap Assemblies and there is great desire to promote work and research among ECRs. Karmen and Tyler will approach A4Cap about this opportunity.

7.8. Eklipse

Marie Vandwalle gave a brief update on the activities of the 2 EU projects which were initiated by Eklipse, as well as its involved personnel. There is a new EMB member, Roxanne Leberger; and it was noted that a call for new Method Expert Group members will be launched next month. Updates were delivered on the projects ECO-READY and Restoreid. Eklipse is dependent upon the overheads generated by Alternet as its budget funding stream (i.e. no overheads generated by UFZ will come back to Eklipse) ; it needs a budget (preferably longer term) so that it can plan future activities, as noted in its business plan. Eklipse is presently putting new projects under the umbrella of Alternet on hold because it has not been considered sufficiently efficient by Marie and the KCB; new projects are being brought in under the umbrella of UFZ.

7.9. Alternet-LTER

Mark Frenzel reported on Alternet infrastructure news, including with the external institution eLTER RI. Most notably, a Memorandum of Cooperation has recently been established and signed between Alternet and eLTER RI. Two representatives per party will support this partnership, most likely Michael Mirtl and someone from Alternet. The intersection of topics, member organisations, stakeholders, and Alternet's history initiating LTER-Europe in 2007 make this partnership natural. Benefits of this partnership: there can be mutual benefit from networking; Alternet research priorities and policy relevant research issues supported by eLTER data; facilitated access to eLTER sites and data; development and strengthening of communication in the SPI; enhancement of the usage of services and infrastructure offered by the parties; joint thematic activities (such as conferences).

8. Alternet Strategic Action Portfolio - Philip Roche

Chair Philip introduced his proposal for a four-pillar strategic action portfolio for Alternet moving forward. These include:

PILLAR 1: Research & Knowledge Generation

–Alternet Collaborative Projects (ACP): Research collaboration initiatives enabling member institutes to conduct joint studies across Europe, leveraging pan European distribution of expertise and field sites.

–Infrastructures: Support and coordination with LTER-Europe (Long-Term Ecosystem Research) network and LTSER (Long-Term Socio-Ecological Research) platforms, strengthening European capacity for comparative ecosystem research.

PILLAR 2: Capacity Building & Community

–Summer School: Annual training program providing young researchers with interdisciplinary approaches to biodiversity and ecosystem research.

–A4Cap: Alumni network connecting students, young researchers, and Summer School graduates, fostering long-term professional development and collaboration.

–Alternet Conference: Biennial network events bringing together the Alternet community for knowledge exchange, strategic discussions, and relationship building.

PILLAR 3: Policy Impact & Influence

–Science Policy - Eklipse: Comprehensive science-policy interface mechanism providing systematic evidence synthesis to inform European biodiversity and ecosystem policy decisions.

–Rapid Policy Response: Quick expert mobilization for time-sensitive policy/research needs

–EU Research Strategy: Strategic planning and positioning to shape European biodiversity research priorities, funding programs, and infrastructure development. Horizon scanning, research gaps, etc.

PILLAR 4: Communication and Dissemination

–Communication: Knowledge transfer and outreach connecting all three pillars, disseminating research findings, policy insights, and capacity-building opportunities to scientists, policymakers, and the broader public

–Internal communication

Joan suggested a team of people would be needed for rapid response action; he noted that focus should not only be on EU strategy, but also on supporting transnational strategies. Sibylle stated that there is a strong need for support for nature restoration law implementation; if we can strengthen NGO and civil society activities in support of restoration, we can play a pivotal role and step up to fill gaps within the work of BioAgora. There is an absence of biodiversity in the content of FP10; there needs to be mobilization among those working in this field to make a statement and impact concerning the need to prioritise biodiversity research and conservation. Interactions between Alternet and policymakers/stakeholders of member states needs to be strengthened; Sibylle cited the SPI workshop in Ghent and dialogue workshop interactive tools (fishbowls, facilitated dialogues, serious games) as an example of this. National notes alongside a European strategy was suggested. Marie noted that Alternet could play an important role supporting the BioAgora knowledge exchange network. Allan stated that there is an urgent need for a three-way partnership between the work of Alternet, BioAgora, and Biodiversa+, noting that we could, in particular, do more to support the work of Biodiversa+. He also suggested that Alternet's work to support early career researchers should also be emphasised and strengthened. Maurice suggested to look into our institutes and identifying existing work/expertise on nature restoration that can be integrated and actionised.

Marie expressed concern regarding the rapid policy response initiative, as it may have crossover with the work of Eklipse (in-depth request > 9 months) and BioAgora (fast request using 1-8 months). Philip suggested joint statements of Alternet policy positions is what he envisions. Marie noted that some infrastructure to support an effective initiative beyond just emails would be helpful.

In terms of EU research strategy, proactive engagement with calls and content has been suggested. The work of Fiona on a CO-OP4CBD expert database was noted, and it was suggested that an Alternet expert database that organises the expertise of Alternet partners

could be developed. Alternet SC members should communicate exactly how much time they can dedicate to activities and what specific tasks they can take on; likewise for other partners (Council members, MB members, etc.)—it should be communicated with both Alternet and with institute directors what is currently used and what is needed. Lisa stated that clear mandates to dedicate time and energy to specific tasks are needed. We need to clearly, officially assign tasks so that they can be communicated to institutes and time and resources can then ideally be dedicated to them. Philip noted that it is important when members volunteer for Alternet activities that this is acknowledged by their directors/institutes.

Maurice questioned how we can make what Alternet does more appealing and of added value in order to mobilise institute directors. Sibylle suggested asking each director what they perceive as the added value of Alternet (why are they members?). Allan stated that Alternet should show the evidence of impactful interactions facilitated through the summer school, A4Cap, and Alternet conferences to demonstrate added value of Alternet membership. Philip noted the need to be appealing to not only directors but also to researchers. It should be emphasised that we are not a group producing novel research but a group that is improving research through collaboration. Marie expressed that Alternet should capitalise on its strengths; and that our strength regarding the research community is support in navigating what is impactful—and, as such, the capacity building pillar should be most strongly emphasised. Fiona questioned whether a survey about perceived added value (and desired added value) of Alternet has been distributed and noted that this would be helpful. She also stated that being part of large EU projects is helping to raise Alternet's profile and position it as indispensable. Following the conclusion of these projects, elements of its work can continue—such as expert mobilisation following the end of the CO-OP4CBD project. Crossover, interactions, and synergies with PEER were discussed; Philip noted that the internal awareness of PEER is likely lower than Alternet.

9. Preparation for pre-Council meeting work – deadlines, task assignments - Philip / Jiska

Philip proposed a remote meeting in January prior to the Council meeting to finalise proposals and activity plans.

Philip presented the Alternet EU project budgets and overheads. Maurice noted that Alternet was also responsible for two additional Eklipse requests (DG Mare & FOB) which are now finished. We received 65k, spent 44k; as such, we have 21k in the Alternet account. Philip proposes that this amount can be reallocated to Eklipse in 2026, on top of possible available overheads. Marie noted the importance of avoiding overspending in the future. Philip stated that an amount (e.g. 5%) should be designated for Alternet overheads in the future. As requests and projects are the basis of the self-sustaining model of Eklipse, Marie expressed that the 21k should be returned to Eklipse. A lesson learned is that secondments are to be avoided in the future, especially if they are not part of the budget proposal and GA. Financial reporting for ECO-READY and CO-OP4CBD are shortly upcoming and there is overspending on these two projects because of the expenses associated with secondments.

Both of these projects conclude in 2026. COOP4CBD is discussing internally an extension of 6 months, to end at the same time as BioAgora (i.e. 30.06.2027).

Philip questioned if there is a way to reduce the current secondment contracts to minimize losses. Direct employment contracts are much less expensive. Jiska expressed doubt regarding flexibility from NORCE and uncertainty regarding Stirling. Despite concerns about secondments, it was acknowledged that Brooke and Nils are doing an excellent job. Figures should now be updated so that everything is streamlined.

Marie recommended not overextending ourselves and to focus on bringing the four present projects to a successful conclusion rather than focusing on entering new projects. A meeting is to be held with Eklipse personnel prior to the Council meeting. Allan stated that substantial work has been put into this process by Marie, Maurice, and Jiska. As coordinators at the time that Alternet adopted Eklipse, the decision of Allan and Juliette was for the survival of Eklipse—supported strongly by Allan, Juliette, Marie, and Maurice. Eklipse is still operating and is incredibly vital today, which means that this deal was worthwhile despite all of the challenges. Allan also pointed to Fiona's participation on behalf of Alternet in the EU projects as an example of how they can be approached effectively and successfully. Maurice noted that all concerns have been aimed at the budgets of these projects, and that the content is of great importance and often gets overlooked in these discussions.

For the proposed rapid response initiatives on relevant policy issues, a new representative would be needed on the SC. A one-pager proposal is needed to share with the Council if such an initiative is to go forward; Allan volunteers to help lead, if others are interested. SPI and science lectures are very valuable for internal engagement; and as Juliette does not have capacity, a volunteer is needed to take leadership. An internal engagement mechanism is suggested. Fiona was suggested as someone who could help facilitate internal engagement via her work on the expert database. Uta was suggested as someone who likewise has a profile that could contribute to this initiative as well. Successful engagement requires face-to-face interactions; the capacity building that takes place at the A4Cap Assembly was noted. Allan suggested that A4Cap could take over the SPI/science seminars. Tyler affirmed that there is interest and capacity within A4Cap.

Internal organisation and rearrangement of personnel/duties was addressed next. Adriana will step down from communications; Mark is stepping down from infrastructures and need to be replaced, Michael Mirtl could apply. Mart will step down from call exchange and transition to focus on internal engagement, with support from CREAM. Fiona volunteers to lead the new initiative on policy position statements. Sibylle is interested in EU research strategy work, including call exchange work. Ideally, communications will be overseen by Pensoft if their membership is accepted by the Council.

Current members and functions:

- **Chair SC:** Philip Roche

- **Vice Chair CS:** Allan Watt
- **Chair Council:** Jiska van Dijk
- **Vice Chair Council:** Ana Lillebo
- **Treasurer:** Maurice Hoffmann
- **Secretary MB:** Uta Fritsch
- **Summer School:** Allan Watt
- **SPI (seminars):** Juliette Young (steps down)
- **Call Exchange:** Sibylle Shroer takes over from Mart
- **SPI / Eclipse:** Eclipse stays an Alternet activity; Marie stays on the SC.
- **Communications:** Adriana steps down; Pensoft can take over the SC vacancy (nomination)
- **ACP Collaborative Projects:** Joan Pino remains
- **Conferences:** Lisa Norton (to be confirmed)
- **A4Cap:** Karmen remains
- **Research infrastructure:** Mark steps down; Michael Mirtl to be nominated for this vacancy

New actions:

- **Internal Engagement:** Mart Kulvik; additional support from CREAM, Fiona
- **Rapid Response/Policy Position Statements:** Fiona Nevzati, with support from Allan Watt (one pager proposal needed for Council)

10. AOB

The possibility of having deputy SC members for each activity was suggested. There was agreement to identify deputy candidates. Representation for activities has a duration of two years with the option of renewal.

The MoA with PEER will need to be reinstated in early 2026; Jiska requests support on this initiative. There also remains the semi-vacant role of Alternet's IPBES stakeholder position which should be fulfilled if there is interest. This would require some budget allocation to support attendance of IPBES meetings. The upcoming meeting is in Manchester (early February).

11. End of meeting.

It was noted that the SC meeting had the best in-person turnout for an internal meeting since the pandemic began. Tyler will prepare a doodle for a followup SC meeting in January (between the 5th and 16th).

The meeting closed at noon.