PAID CONTENT PRODUCED FOR FAITH IN NATURE BY BBC StoryWorks Commercial Productions

NATURE ON THE BOARD

IT ALL BEGAN WITH A QUESTION

Taking a walk after an eight-hour board meeting, Faith in Nature's Anne Hopkins turned to fellow creative director Simeon Rose and asked:

"WHAT IF NATURE REALLY WAS THE BOSS?"

Coming from creative backgrounds, Rose and Hopkins joined the board of the natural ingredient-based beauty brand in 2019 and 2020 respectively, and started to question corporate decision-making. "Everyone on that board cares deeply about nature and wants to do the right thing," Hopkins recalls.

"But I remember thinking, why do companies work this way, where salespeople, technical people, finance people have a say, but the natural world doesnt get a vote?" **Every decision companies make impacts the natural world, but the one stakeholder that doesn't get a say in those decisions is Nature itself, adds Rose.**

THAT SPARKED AN IDEA...

Inspired by the story of the Whanganui River in New Zealand, which was the first river in the world to be granted legal personhood in 2017, Rose and Hopkins sought the advice of Earth Law Center in the US and Lawyers for Nature in the UK to develop a similar model at Faith in Nature. Faith in Nature were advised by Lawyers For Nature and Earth Law Center that it wasn't possible to make Nature a CEO, but it was possible to ask a director to represent Nature – and give it a voice and vote.

AND THE IDEA BECAME REALITY

IN 2022, FAITH IN NATURE BECAME THE FIRST COMPANY IN THE WORLD TO PUT NATURE ON ITS BOARD, BY APPOINTING A REPRESENTATIVE FOR IT

"I DON'T COME TO BOARD MEETINGS DRESSED UP AS A TREE"

laughs Brontie Ansell, who represented Nature On The Board (NOTB) at Faith in Nature, and is a director at Lawyers for Nature, a collective of lawyers, researchers and campaigners who – through unregulated legal work – advocate for the rights of nature. "What NOTB does, psychologically and from an anthropological perspective, is bring rich, nuanced conversations into the boardroom. **It makes companies slow down so that decisions can't be rushed through, with profits at all costs**. Nature can abstain the same as every other board member has the authority to and say, 'I need more time', and the board grants it."

WE MET NATURE...

Having a real person to represent nature in the form of a guardian, Ansell believes, increases everyone's empathy in the boardroom. **It makes everyone ask, what would a river say if we were taking all its water and not replenishing it? Or polluting it? How do the reeds feel?** Its tough for any rational and moralistic human being to look nature in the eye, month after month, and not be prepared to change this when they know how much damage they might be causing," she explains. It creates an acceptance that business has to change."

AND NATURE VOTED ON THE

PRODUCTS YOU SEE TODAY...

After 18 months, Faith in Nature relaunched its products in June 2024, the first range that was voted on and developed with nature as a board member from the very start.

Faith in Nature's 500ml bottles have changed **from 100% recycled plastic** to **100% recycled aluminium.** Plastic can be recycled only a few times, and must be mixed with some virgin plastic, before it becomes too used to be recycled into new plastic products. **Aluminium, by contrast, can be turned into a new aluminium product many times over, and more aluminium is recovered for recycling than plastic.**

Products now contain 99.5% natural origin ingredients (up from 99%), including an improved base blend of organic rosemary, nettle and chamomile in haircare, and oat, lime and elderberry in bodycare. Hair and body products containing natural ingredients contain fewer petroleum-based ingredients which are associated with higher environmental costs.

Sourcing and supply chains have also been addressed. **Tea-tree oil, now comes from a supplier who sources from farmers working to rebuild natural habitats for koalas in Australia,** after the devastating impacts of bushfires and subsequent flooding in New South Wales in 2019.

The project, based in the lower Richmond River catchment near Byron Bay, is **supporting biodiversity and breeding programmes by creating 1.5km (0.9 miles) of strategic koala corridors connecting areas where koalas already live, establishing over 12,000 new plants, and helping to restore degraded remnant vegetation across 10 hectares.**

Faith in Natures Organic Shea Butter, meanwhile, is **produced by women's cooperatives in Ghana, providing around 15,000 jobs and income to women in rural locations.** The fully traceable supply chain allows for the traceability of the Shea nuts back to their original harvest location.

BUT NEW IDEAS CAME FROM EVERYONE, EVERYWHERE...

Crucially, some of these innovations came – not directly from NOTB – but from the brands formulations and sourcing teams. For Juliet Rose, head of development at the Eden Project, who will become Faith in Nature's next Guardian after Ansell stepped down in August 2024, this is an area she wants to nurture. "**How can we help the staff be as connected to nature as possible through their workplace? Because once they are, that will play out in their everyday decision-making, be it in the office or the factory floor," she explains.**

Juliet Rose – who is no relation to Simeon – believes we should get NOTB out of the boardroom too, into daily life and other non-corporate sectors including schools, parish councils and the NHS. Nature should be everywhere," she says. Most people innately know if something is good or bad for nature. Its not always rocket science. Small interventions count and acts of leadership count."

Simeon Rose describes it as two sides of a coin. On one side, you have the landmark, legal change of appointing nature to the board. On the other, you have the question 'What would nature say?'. It's a question so simple anyone can answer it," he says. **Internally it's about giving all staff permission to use it, to experiment and bring a spirit of play into it. And for people more generally, it's about saying, if you just take a moment to properly consider that question, you probably already know the answer."**

At Faith in Nature, the words **"recycling is good, refilling is better"** are written around the necks of its bottles. So instead of buying a new bottle – however great its recycling credentials – consider refilling. The new metal bottles can be bought with or without a 100% recyclable pump so that customers who already own one with a pump can refill and reuse their existing bottle. That's a whole pump saved. Or perhaps switch to solid products, which use less packaging and contain less water, like shampoo or conditioner bars.

"Beyond the products, were seeing a mindset shift throughout the business whereby the question, **"What would nature say?"** is taking hold, taking nature into account earlier and earlier in the decision-making process," says Simeon Rose. "So 'impact' is no longer just something that the sustainability department adds up and offsets, but something that everyone is considering and therefore reducing along the way. **Put simply, NOTB is about asking permission before, not forgiveness afterwards."**

IN A BID TO ENCOURAGE OTHER

COMPANIES TO APPOINT
NATURE TO THEIR BOARDS,

FAITH IN NATURE HAS OPEN-SOURCED THEIR NOTB MODEL AND THE SUPPORTING LEGAL DOCUMENTS.

"The problem isn't always that we don't know the answers; it's that we're not asking the questions," says Hopkins. "It's when we ask ourselves questions – even if we have to seek out experts for the answers – that things get interesting, that we get to a different place."

HOW ELSE COULD ANY OF US AFFECT CHANGE?

–SIMEON ROSE

PAID AND PRESENTED BY

FAITH IN NATURE

A VOTE FOR NATURE

THIS ARTICLE WAS PRODUCED FOR FAITH IN NATURE BY BBC STORYWORKS, THE COMMERCIAL CONTENT DIVISION OF BBC GLOBAL NEWS.

DISCOVER MORE

Copyright © 2024 BBC. The BBC is not responsible for the content of external sites. Read more

Cookies | Ad Choices/Do Not Sell My Info