



# Environmental Rights Summit 2023

In review

# WELCOME FROM ERCS

On the 6th September 2023 we welcomed over 130 people from across Scotland to our first Environmental Rights Summit in Edinburgh to demand environmental justice. We hoped to create a space for everyone to learn from each other and create new friends and allies to achieve our vision:

**A Scotland where every person's right to a healthy environment is respected, protected and fulfilled.**

At ERCS, we talk about facing the triple planetary crisis of climate breakdown, biodiversity loss and the pervasive pollution of our air, land and water. Since our formation in 2020, we have been working hard to tackle substantive environmental problems. Many people in Scotland, particularly living in areas of highest deprivation, suffer from pollution, environmental degradation, close proximity to derelict and contaminated land, poor environmental quality, and poor access to nature-rich and multifunctional greenspace. This contributes to health inequalities and systemic discrimination. There are also procedural problems in using the law which is complicated, intimidating and unaffordable.

Our work in raising awareness of our rights, providing free legal advice, advocating for reform and, as a last resort, taking strategic public interest litigation aims to tackle these problems head on.



-  
Dr Shivali Fifield  
Chief Officer



# Workshops

We hosted workshops led by our excellent facilitators Jamie, Alex, Nikki, Ben and Hannah.



Thanks to The Ferret for explaining how we can use Freedom of Information requests to hold public bodies to account.

Our team at ERCS ran a session on the challenges and opportunities involved in going to court over the environment, drawing on the experiences of our advice service.



Our friends at Lawyers for Nature asked us to consider how we can change the moral and legislative framework to give nature legal rights, and fundamentally change our relationship with nature.



Planning Democracy and Action to Protect Rural Scotland led a session on how we can challenge poor planning decisions and campaign for a fairer system where the environment is front and centre.

“  
... really thought provoking  
”





For the first time in a long time I felt I was with a **collective** of folk, **alert, aware, and active** in countering the degradation of our nature... sharing an alternative approach to environmental justice and to hold the systems we use to govern our society to account.





# Voices for Justice



Our Voices for Justice spoke out! Many thanks to George, Ishbel, Jim, Kathleen and Jo for talking about the persistent challenges communities face in enforcing environmental regulations.

**See the film.**

From industrial land grabs and litter in Aberdeenshire to sewage overflows and sewage sludge spreading in Central Scotland, they highlighted the impacts on local communities and the barriers to environmental justice.



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I greatly enjoyed  
the event and  
found the content  
really informative

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Plenary session on  
Voices for Justice  
was exceptional -  
the passion of  
those involved  
coming through  
strongly but in a  
clear, concise and  
coherent way

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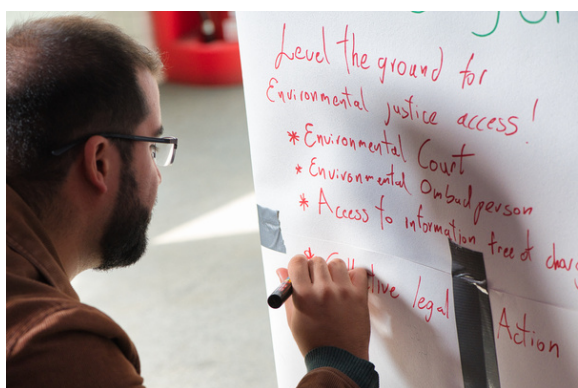
The powers against us, be they big developers, or pre-defined government agendas, are too big for any one of us to take on.

We need a **collective voice.**

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We shared our  
campaigns and  
struggles...



...and our hopes  
for the future



# An enforceable right to a healthy environment

Prof David Boyd, UN Special Rapporteur on Human Rights and the Environment and Prof Elisa Morgera, Professor of Global Environmental Law at Strathclyde University gave us some fascinating insights into how the right to a healthy environment has been delivered around the world and the potential for Scotland to be a world leader.

See the [film](#).



And we launched our new animation:  
The human right to a healthy environment - what it is and why it's important!





# Human Rights Bill

The Scottish Government's Human Rights Bill Team explained how the recognition of the right to a healthy environment will operate within the wider Bill framework.



## The state of environmental governance in Scotland:

what it is and what needs to be fixed



Bringing together all the issues raised throughout the day, we chaired a Q&A on what needs to improve for effective environmental laws to protect our health and the environment.

# Our Chair, Lloyd Austin, closed the summit:

“

An inspiring day – today’s event has both demonstrated the scale of environmental challenges and demand for action to address these. The opportunities arise from the number and diversity of people who want to make a difference.

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Thank you to all those who made the summit such a great event – the speakers, workshop leaders, and the ERCS staff team – but, most of all, thanks to all those who attended. I hope you will be inspired to further action.

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**Thank you!**



Thanks also to Open Aye photography and GLO technical Support.



## The Environmental Rights Centre for Scotland (ERCS)

To support individuals and communities to use their rights to protect the environment, tackle climate change, and improve local biodiversity and greenspaces for health and wellbeing.

### What can I do about an environmental problem?

Contact our rights officer to talk more at [rights@ercs.scot](mailto:rights@ercs.scot)  
Contact our free legal advice service at [www.ercs.scot/get-advice](http://www.ercs.scot/get-advice)  
Call out office on 0131 358 0038 or freephone on 0800 861 1738