



Securing environmental rights in Scotland



Environmental Rights Centre for Scotland
Strategy 2026–2029



Law students at the Fossil Free Law student gathering, February 2026. Credit ERCS.



Lived experience workshop for disability-inclusive emergency planning, in partnership with Inclusion Scotland and Sensing Climate, November 2025. Credit David Mollison.

Front cover photo: Celebrating five years of ERCS, September 2025. Credit: Eloise Bishop.

About us

The Environmental Rights Centre for Scotland (ERCS) was established in 2020 and is Scotland's only environmental law charity providing free legal expertise in public interest environmental law.

Our vision is of a Scotland where every person's right to a healthy environment is respected, protected and fulfilled.

We cover laws relating to land-use planning, climate change, pollution control, environmental health, the conservation of biodiversity, and any other field (e.g. cultural heritage, transport, energy) to the extent that it impacts on the natural environment and the right to live in a healthy environment.

Our mission is to assist everyone, especially people who face the biggest barriers, to exercise their rights in environmental law and to protect the environment. Our four work areas take a human rights-based approach and reinforce each other to close the gap between policy and practice:

- > Rights awareness and outreach
- > Legal advice and representation
- > Strategic / public interest litigation
- > Advocacy in policy and law reform.

Our [annual reports and financial statements](#) detail the progress and outcomes of our work which has the overall aims of strengthening environmental democracy and enforcing the human right to a healthy environment. Our growth reflects the increasing demand for our services and influence of our advocacy.

Our values

We aim to be:

- > Open, accessible and approachable in how we offer our services
- > Respectful, collaborative and enabling in how we deliver our services
- > Evidence-based and assertive in how we advocate for policy and law reform
- > Trusted and authoritative in how we pursue environmental rights and litigation
- > Transparent in how we evaluate our impacts and improve our overall effectiveness.

To find out more about who we are and our journey see [About us](#) on our website.

Sign up to our [newsletter](#).

Find us on www.ercs.scot, [LinkedIn](#), and [Instagram](#).

The problem

Environmental damage and human suffering are two sides of the same coin. Globally, we are facing a triple planetary crisis of climate breakdown, biodiversity loss, and increasing pollution of our air, land and water. Fossil fuels and our over-consumption of resources contribute to climate disasters, fuel and food insecurity, and are pushing the planet to breaking point.

In Scotland, severe weather events, air and water pollution, proximity to contaminated land, and poor access to nature-rich greenspace are examples of substantive environmental problems that contribute to inequalities in health and wellbeing. Unsound management of chemicals and waste, intensive agriculture, industrial fishing, and monocultural forestry plantations are devastating our land and marine ecosystems, contributing to a rapid decline in flora and fauna.

People living in areas of high disadvantage, children, older people, disabled people, and people with health conditions are disproportionately affected by environmental problems and are often least responsible for causing environmental damage. They also often have fewer resources to challenge these environmental burdens. This contributes to systemic discrimination and environmental injustice.



Community campaigners at the [Clean Up Scotland's Sewage](#) campaign launch in November 2025, calling for action on sewage pollution from sewer overflows. Credit: ERCS.

Environmental Justice Network



Environmental Justice Network film still. Credit: JHP Visuals/ERCS.

ERCS's Environmental Justice Network are clients from our law service.

Watch a short film by the [Network](#). For more lived experience accounts, see our [Voices for Justice](#) blogs and [webinars](#) from environmental defenders across Scotland.

The need and demand for ERCS

We should be able to hold public authorities and polluters to account to protect and restore the natural world, but in Scotland it is incredibly difficult to use our legal system – it is complicated, intimidating and unaffordable.

At the same time, the environment has no voice in the Scottish courts and relies on us to be that voice.

Our purpose is to increase the capacity and opportunity of individuals, groups and organisations to challenge environmental injustice at neighbourhood, local authority and national levels.

ERCS promotes environmental justice in two ways:

- **Substantive:** by using the law to improve environmental protection and restoration and securing the highest standards for a clean, healthy and sustainable environment for everyone.
- **Procedural:** by working for equitable participation in environmental decision-making, recognition of robust and enforceable environmental rights, and for fair, equitable, timely and affordable access to legal remedies.

The evidence from our free legal advice service and the lived experience of Scotland's environmental defenders persuaded us to do more. We start this new strategy having established our law firm, ERCS Legal Ltd, to provide free legal representation as well as advice and assistance.

We are excited by the new alliances we have formed with organisations and people across Scotland to make the connections between social, environmental and climate justice. This is more important than ever with the twin fears of the cost-of-living crisis continuing, fuelled by unsustainable energy and food practices, and a very unjust transition to a fossil free future.

Our strategic aims and priorities 2026–2029



This graphic shows the interrelationship of our four work areas, our strategic aims and priorities to achieve them.



Our actions

Our rights awareness and outreach increase understanding of environmental rights and how to exercise them

Our actions

- > Grow our evidence-based and trusted **resource library** tailored to different audiences and levels of knowledge.
- > Continue to amplify the voices of people with **lived experience** of environmental burdens and barriers to access to justice.
- > Grow the **Environmental Justice Network** of Scotland's environmental defenders.
- > Build on our participatory research with racialised and marginalised groups to improve the policy and practice of public authorities.

Our advocacy reduces barriers to access to justice and improves environmental laws.

Our actions

- > Shape the incorporation of the human right to a healthy environment and ecocide, and its effective implementation.
- > Hold the Scottish Government to account to fully address its non-compliance with the Aarhus Convention's access to justice requirements by reforming legal expenses to make access to justice affordable.
- > Continue to call for a specialist environmental court to enable affordable, accessible, timely and effective access to justice for all.
- > Monitor policy and legal developments and advocate for robust protections and enforcement including for sewage pollution.
- > Advocate for equal rights of appeal in the planning system.
- > Contribute to the debate on the Rights of Nature.

Our legal advice enables action on holding public authorities and polluters to account and increases access to justice

Our actions

- > Provide free legal advice to at least 250 individuals/community groups/ NGOs p.a.
- > Produce regular **snapshots** of enquiries to the Law Service, to scrutinise our effectiveness and identify areas for legal and policy reform.
- > Support the establishment of university environmental law clinics.
- > Contribute our environmental expertise to advocate for wider access to justice reforms.

Our litigation enforces environmental laws and strengthens the rule of law

Our actions

- > At least eight public interest cases p.a. from our Law Service including partnership with other organisations.

