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Scoping an East/West Environmental Rights Forum



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Summary of Recommendations

A civil society-led E/W environmental rights forum should be established to analyse and address structural barriers to environmental justice and feed coordinated responses into national and international oversight processes.

A **full audit of non-compliance issues** should be completed for the four UK jurisdictions, and the findings of this audit this should be communicated to the UK government and if necessary to the ACCC.

The **environmental rights forum should work with international campaigns to advance the right to a clean, healthy and sustainable environment** e.g. the Campaign for the Right to a Healthy Environment at the Council of Europe including inviting a country visit from the UN Special Rapporteur.

Scoping an East/West Environmental Rights Forum

About us

The Environmental Rights Centre for Scotland (ERCS) is an environmental law charity which provides free legal expertise in public interest environmental law. 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. Environmental Justice Network Ireland promotes strategic collaboration between researchers, civil society, lawyers and communities to address the root causes of environmental and social injustice on the island of Ireland. Our organisation is built around designing and delivering innovative mechanisms and events that facilitate and convene people who can contribute perspective and co-designed solutions to solve complex problems.

The workshop

On 23 September 2026, EJNI and ERCS held an in-person, one-day facilitated workshop establishing options for the creation of an East/West Environmental Rights Forum. It brought together organisations and professionals working on environmental rights from across the UK and Ireland to exchange ideas and discuss co-creation of mechanisms to build lasting collaborative relationships. The focus of this scoping workshop was on the challenges faced within the four UK jurisdictions, with future plans to extend this forum to additional partners operating in Ireland in recognition of the need for cooperation on shared environmental challenges on the island of Ireland. This report sets out the breadth of issues discussed at the forum, and the findings about the potential for a recurring environmental rights forum to ensure better collaboration between jurisdictions across the UK and Ireland on Aarhus and environmental rights issues.

The idea for an East/West Environmental Rights Forum emerges in the wake of the first ever Council of Europe Environmental Rights Forum, held in Strasbourg in June 2026. This forum aimed to enhance the collaboration between Environmental Human Rights Defenders (EHRDs), civil society organisations (CSOs), grassroot movements, Indigenous Peoples, government representatives and national, regional and international institutions and mechanisms, as well as other relevant actors to address challenges, share experiences, and promote stronger protections for EHRDs across Council of Europe member states. It is hoped that a UK-Ireland environmental rights forum will offer similar opportunities for collaboration and coordinated action for those working to defend, protect, and promote environmental rights.

The concept of a 'rights forum' is not unique to the environmental sphere, and there are already various recurring conferences and forums held in the UK to promote other categories of rights. The British Institute of Human Rights, for example, held a civil society gathering in 2025 to celebrate Human Rights Day, allowing professionals in the sector to come together to champion human rights and also raise concerns. Creating solidarity between professionals during a time where commitment to human rights was under threat was noted as an important outcome of the conference. Similarly, a Rights of the Child Conference was held in Edinburgh in 2024 to discuss the importance of strengthening children's rights across the devolved UK jurisdictions and Jersey and discuss the implementation of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child. Attendees identified the gaps in policy and law protecting children's rights and discussed how these might be addressed. The participants agreed that a recurring forum is important to strengthen partnerships and also promote government accountability.

The timing of this scoping exercise is important. One of the findings of our scoping workshop was that Aarhus Convention implementation is facing various challenges across each jurisdiction of the UK and that similar (but not identical) challenges also exist in Ireland. All participants agreed that the threat to rights set out under the Aarhus Convention is increasing both domestically and internationally. In the UK context, there are also concerns that a full picture of the variations in compliance issues faced within each UK jurisdictions is not being presented at United Nations international meetings. It therefore seems timely that an environmental rights forum should convene to voice key concerns and develop a plan of action to prevent further erosion of access to justice and environmental rights.



Participants in the 'Scoping an East/West Environmental Rights Forum' workshop, Edinburgh 23.09.26

Context

The UK is a signatory to the UNECE Aarhus Convention, which establishes a range of obligations including access to environmental justice, access to environmental information and public participation in environmental decision-making. The UK has been found to be in non-compliance with the Aarhus Convention on a range of issues,[1] but in November 2025 reaffirmed its commitment to upholding its obligations under the Convention. A constructive, positive and solutions-orientated approach to overcoming barriers to environmental justice which are creating non-compliance with the Aarhus Convention is now vital. This will require input from civil society, environmental defenders and communities.

However, environmental law (which is primarily a devolved matter) and legal systems differ across the UK, and this means that experiences in the four UK jurisdictions of accessing environmental justice and upholding Aarhus Convention rights have varied. There are also different legal procedural rules in each jurisdiction and variation across issues like costs and funding.[2] The nature and extent of this variation across the UK is unclear.

There are also indications that differences in the quality of environmental justice delivered across the UK may be widening. Recent research from the UK Office of Environmental Protection has demonstrated that post-Brexit intra-UK regulatory divergence in the context of the environment has the potential to widen existing gaps in how the environment, and by extension how the environmental rights of citizens are protected in the four UK jurisdictions.

Moreover, when the UK is required to appear at the Aarhus Convention's Meeting of the Parties (the main governing body of the Convention) and the Aarhus Convention Compliance Committee ('ACCC' - the main body for the review of compliance with the Convention), the Department for Environment (DEFRA) represents the UK. There are concerns that this approach has failed to fully reflect the nuanced situations in each jurisdiction, and rather, the perspective presented is Westminster (i.e. England) focused. Northern Ireland's position is also complicated by the land border with Ireland and the environmental rights implications of the Windsor Framework Agreement (which sets out the post-Brexit arrangements for Northern Ireland), as highlighted in research commissioned by the Northern Ireland Human Rights Commission. The relatively unstable wider political environment in post-Brexit UK means that the context within which environmental human rights defenders and civil society organisations (CSOs) operate can change frequently depending on the priorities of the governing political party. Aarhus rights can become negatively impacted during these times of political change and instability, making collaboration and knowledge sharing between CSOs operating in each jurisdiction even more important – but even more difficult.

Establishing the nature, extent and impact of the barriers to environmental justice across the UK is a necessary first step in understanding how these barriers might be overcome and will inform how organisations working in different parts of the UK on these issues might work together to help develop more consistent, coherent and comprehensive environmental justice.

Environmental Rights issues in the UK and Ireland

Enhancing environmental justice in the UK

We asked workshop participants to identify one change that could enhance environmental justice in the UK or their own jurisdiction.

- **Limiting the financial barriers to accessing justice -** each jurisdiction has witnessed rollbacks to financial protections available under the Aarhus Convention. For civil society organisations, the risk of taking a case to court and losing is at times too great. This prevents individuals and organisations with valid cases from progressing them. Protective expense orders (PEOs) in Scotland are applied restrictively, and in Northern Ireland and England and Wales, recent case law has set a precedent for a narrow approach to applying Aarhus cost protections in environmental justice cases.

"Reducing financial barriers to allow legal rights to be asserted by individuals and communities from all socio-economic backgrounds"- Tanvi Sengupta, Environmental Law Foundation.

- **Improving recognition of importance of Aarhus issues-** participants called for better understanding, engagement and advocacy with Aarhus issues among wider NGO communities and rights defenders, and not just within legal circles.

'The strongest form of environmental protection is political will – legal solutions must come from community solutions at the core.' Alison Hough BL

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[1] In the latest case of non-compliance, the UK was found in breach of Article 8 and Article 3(1) of the Aarhus Convention for its failure to meet minimum requirements for public consultation when preparing the EU Withdrawal Bill. See, for example, Briefing: UN committee finds UK breached Aarhus rights | Friends of the Earth

[2] See, for example, EJNI-Costs-Handbook-Dec-2024.pdf for analysis of how rules concerning costs and funding differ in the North and South of Ireland.

- Preventing further regression of environmental rights- these concerns were a common thread throughout the workshop. Changes to advance environmental rights could involve making consultations easier to engage in, making scientific and technical evidence in environmental decision-making more accessible for communities, achieving full implementation of Aarhus in UK law and formally recognising the right to a healthy environment. This would allow for more meaningful public participation in environmental decision-making.

"Make the government realise that their growth agenda is not prevented by people exercising their democratic right/ rule of law."- Carol Day, Leigh Day and RSPB.

- Development of a specialist environmental tribunal or court- there were calls for a specialist environmental tribunal, with an institutional purpose to promote access to justice, the ability to appoint judges and expert members with technical and scientific expertise and the powers to set its own rules and procedures.

- Improved enforcement capabilities within existing environmental bodies- an environmental regulator with strong leadership could be an effective mechanism to ensure Aarhus rights are protected and supported, however it is unclear whether existing regulatory bodies (such as the Office for Environmental Protection (OEP) in England and Northern Ireland, the Environmental Standards Scotland (ESS) and the Office of Environmental Governance Wales (OEGW)) are currently operating with an Aarhus-focused mandate. For example, concerns were expressed that despite ESS being requested to intervene in Aarhus compliance matters several years ago by ERCS, they have made little demonstrable progress.

- UK Compliance and respect for the mechanisms of the Aarhus Convention- the UK's ongoing non-compliance with the Aarhus Convention and refusal to endorse the ACCC's findings has inhibited the effectiveness of the Convention at domestic and international levels. UK compliance and a deterrence for breaching laws would improve environmental justice.

""For the UK Government to implement the case findings of the ACCC and, so as to avoid undermining the effectiveness of the Aarhus Convention, to refrain from blocking the endorsement of the ACCC's findings." Katie de Kauwe, Interim Head of Legal Friends of the Earth.

- Northern Ireland- compliance with obligations under the Windsor Framework to avoid any devolution of rights in Northern Ireland following Brexit would facilitate improved environmental justice in Northern Ireland. Reform to the planning system would also improve accessibility of these proceedings to the public and allow for effective participation in high-profile decisions affecting the environment.

Latest legal developments

We asked participants to identify some of the latest legal developments in their respective jurisdictions. The table below therefore represents a snapshot of some recent developments, however there was consensus that a full audit of compliance issues and recent/forthcoming legal developments would be beneficial.

Scotland	• The Scottish Civil Justice Council recently held a public consultation on proposed plans to expand the scope of cost protection orders (known as Protective Expenses Orders (PEOs)) in Aarhus cases in Scotland. ERCS responded to the consultation welcoming most of the changes, however, it continues to call for the replacement of the PEO system with 'qualified one-way costs shifting'. • The government recently announced plans to merge national environmental public bodies into one single environmental body, which has raised concerns about de-regulation of the sector.
Northern Ireland	• The Department of Justice published a consultation on Access to Justice in relation to the Aarhus Convention, with results published at the beginning of 2026. Concerns were raised over the low number of responses to that consultation (only 8 responses were received, 3 of which were from CSOs). • There have been two developments in jurisprudence concerning treatment of Aarhus cost protections in Northern Ireland. (1) In *Re Duff* [2025] NICA 70, McCloskey LJ questioned whether applications for Aarhus cost protections are receiving enough scrutiny (para 60), which has led to counsel and notice parties more frequently arguing against cost protections being applied. (2) In subsequent case *Re Deborah and John Lynch's application for Judicial Review (No 4)* [2026] NIKB 41, McLaughlin J took a broader approach to what cases were applicable for Aarhus cost protections, which has been welcomed.
Wales	• There have been some positive moves in relation to investigating environmental pollution incidents in Wales recently, such as Natural Resources Wales's response to incidents in the River Kenfig, • There are ongoing concerns about the public sector's role in decision-making on waste, which raises questions around accountability and transparency, with clear implications for Aarhus Convention rights.
England	• In May 2025, the Court of Appeal for England and Wales adopted a narrow definition to the types of cases that would be entitled to cost protections under the Aarhus Convention (*HM Treasury v Global Feedback Ltd* [2025] EWCA Civ 624). The claimant, Foodrise Ltd (formerly Global Feedback Ltd) appealed to the Supreme Court, and at the time of writing this report the judgment is still pending. • On 10 September 2026, the Government announced a broad package of proposals, looking in particular at reforming consultation obligations. • There are ongoing reforms being proposed to the system for judicial review of energy projects, including removing the paper permission stage for judicial review and removing appeal abilities. The reforms will be extended to nationally significant infrastructure projects. Those reforms include a parliamentary authorisation mechanism to circumvent people being able to challenge these projects and challenge window limitations.
Republic of Ireland	• The Planning and Development Act 1995 has been reformed, with changes to the rules on bringing judicial reviews. This has resulted in strict standards for NGOs – which no other company in company law is subjected to.

	• The Critical Infrastructure Act 2026 provides government with the power to fast-track projects designated as 'critical infrastructure', such as energy and housing developments. However, there are concerns that the changes brought under this new Act will circumvent challenges based on climate obligations.

Recommendation: A full audit of non-compliance issues should be completed for the four UK jurisdictions, and the findings of this audit this should be communicated to the UK government and if necessary to the ACCC.



Workshop participants at the Grassmarket Community Centre, Edinburgh 23.09.26

Government engagement

We asked participants about whether they were aware of UK or devolved government engagement on Aarhus/environmental rights or compliance with the Aarhus Convention. Key points from this conversation included:

- The UK Government has at times shown disengagement and hostility to the principles and spirit of the Convention. On 30 October 2025, it stated it was not planning to accept the ACCC's findings concerning non-compliance with Articles 3(1) and 8 of the Aarhus Convention, however later in November 2025 reaffirmed its commitment to upholding its obligations under the Convention. There has also been the first ever complaint referred to the ACCC by the Special Rapporteur for Environmental Defenders against the UK concerning the treatment of Just Stop Oil protestors.

- However, governments in the devolved jurisdictions have had varying degrees of engagement with the Aarhus Convention recently.
- The Northern Ireland government's stance on the Aarhus Convention has been characterised as somewhat progressive – although the overarching political context in Northern Ireland and fragility of the Executive means it is difficult to achieve any real movement in favour of Aarhus rights.
- In Scotland, CSOs have been engaged in dialogue with civil servants in the Scottish Government and the Scottish Civil Justice Council. This included opportunities to scrutinise the government's action to address the ACCC's recommendations (Decison VII/8 2021 MoP).
- In Wales, there has been indications from Plaid Cymru in its manifesto that it wants to look at planning legislation again. Recruitment is also ongoing for a new chair of the OEGW, and the job listing was framed with a focus on the need for government accountability.
- In Ireland, government welcomed a visit from the UN Special Rapporteur on the right to a clean, healthy and sustainable environment in February 2026 and met with government officials. However, the scope of this visit did not extend to Northern Ireland and there has not yet been a country visit to the UK.

Recommendation: The environmental rights forum should work with international campaigns to advance the right to a clean, healthy and sustainable environment e.g. the Campaign for the Right to a Healthy Environment at the Council of Europe including inviting a country visit from the UN Special Rapporteur.



Workshop participants at the Grassmarket Community Centre, Edinburgh 23.09.26

Horizon scanning

Participants discussed emerging developments that they were concerned or encouraged by from a UK-Ireland or global perspective, as well as in their own jurisdictions.

Aarhus Convention→ Concerns were raised that the Aarhus Convention is not being used to the full extent of its powers, with not enough people talking about the importance of the right to access information and justice in environmental decision-making. There were calls to connect this work with the wider environmental law networks.

Data centres→ Data centres are a significant cause of concern across all jurisdictions, and they are receiving increased public opposition. For example, In Scotland, there are 20 data centres going through the planning system currently.

Artificial intelligence→ The increased use of artificial intelligence, but absence of clear regulation, was a notable concern particularly in light of increased crackdown on the right to protest. In Northern Ireland specifically, the police service for Northern Ireland (PSNI) has discussed using AI in surveillance, and will be trialling live facial recognition technology, which could create a significant chill factor on peaceful protest.

Increased environmental degradation→ The state of the environment is a big issue in the public consciousness currently for all jurisdictions, particularly in light of wildfires and heatwaves during the summer period of 2026. While this is a major concern for environmental justice and CSOs, participants highlighted that this is creating clear opportunities to gather momentum for calls for change and justice.

Rights of Nature→ The growing awareness of rights of nature as an alternative regime for environmental protection was something participants from each jurisdiction were interested in. The use of nature guardians or a guardianship body could have a persuasive role in advocacy by presenting expert evidence, for example. As a movement, it is capturing people's imagination and creating a vision for how society could be.

Northern Ireland→ Concerns about the fragile state of the Northern Ireland government were noted at the time of the forum. Civil society organisations need to be prepared for what happens should they be faced with a scenario where the government collapses again. However, given that Northern Ireland is at the beginning of building its climate governance infrastructure after the passage of the Climate Act, there were hopes that it could learn from other jurisdictions when ensuring it is upheld. Similarly, there was optimism that Northern Ireland's absence of a 'no win, no fee' framework could be addressed, provided there was sustained lobbying of professional bodies such as the Law Society or the Climate Bar Association.

Republic of Ireland→ The reform of judicial review in the circuit court is a key concern coming down the line. There have also been developments in the EU, however it is hard to track what's happening. Another concern is the exemption of data centres from standard regulations across utility and planning frameworks.

Scotland→ Participants encouraged by ongoing advocacy efforts to implement the right to a healthy environment in a Scottish Human Rights Bill, but this has been slow progress with many setbacks. There are proposals for legal aid reform to make it more financially viable, and a bill is currently in the programme for government. Live consultations were ongoing at the time of the forum.

Barriers to Aarhus Convention implementation

"Unregulated capitalism, the privatisation of public functions, and success in environmental justice being seen as threatening to powerful business interests are all barriers to implementation." Eliza Browning, CAJ.

"Disenfranchisement and disempowerment of communities through various legislative reforms."- Naomi Ludhe-Thompson- Rights Community Action.

Generally, the **under-resourced and poorly funded** nature of the Aarhus Convention Compliance Committee was viewed as a barrier to implementation in each jurisdiction, as it has made complaints to this body and its decisions ineffective. For instance, the ERCS made a complaint about the absence of rights of appeal in the planning system, which was found to be admissible at the preliminary stages in 2022, but it has not progressed since then. The amendments to the Attorney General for England and Wales's Legal Risk Guidance suggested a new direction in the UK with lack of respect for international conventions.

The Aarhus Convention is also under threat at international levels. The UK's statement that it wouldn't endorse the ACCC's major non-compliance findings paved the way for new fractures and for states to push back on the ACCC's findings, as well as the role and remit of the UN Special Rapporteurs.

Additionally, the **general political climate in the UK** was noted as a barrier to Aarhus Convention implementation. The UK government has been pushing back on rights of public participation, and any protections and rights around procedural participation are generally viewed as barrier to growth and development. The churn of personnel in government has also made it hard to build relationships and have recurring conversations. In addition to this, there were general concerns that there is no dedicated portfolio or minister with Aarhus specifically in a mandate.

The **lack of public understanding** of the Aarhus Convention, has also limited opportunities for engagement. However, for those who do engage in public participation in decision-making, consultations on reforms and decisions can be **laborious and time intensive** and many consultees lose confidence that government will genuinely consider their views when decisions ultimately proceed unchanged.

In **Scotland**, a barrier to Aarhus implementation is the **increased use of AI in generating freedom of information requests**. There has been a vast increase in the number of appeals (83%) to the Scottish Information Commissioner, but no corresponding increase in the Commissioner's funding, meaning that appeals are taking much longer. Moreover, the Scottish programme for government announced plans to

make the planning system more efficient and streamlined, and to reduce costs. There are concerns however that this could lead to de-regulation of the sector.

Success stories

Success in Scotland

After years of campaigning by the ERCS for affordable access to justice, the Scottish Civil Justice Council (SCJC) announced in January 2026 changes to court rules to protect individuals, communities and CSOs from costly litigation risks when pursuing environmental action. The new draft rules should be brought into effect by January 2027. There is an ongoing ACCC complaint in Scotland, concerning the failure by Civil Justice Council to consult on review of protective expense orders (PEOs) rules. This has promoted changes in Scotland's Aarhus position – civil society were previously not consulted, whereas now it is easier to obtain meetings with the government. Campaigning efforts of local groups and other CSOs recently achieved a vote in Scottish parliament to introduce a moratorium on planning applications for data centres. They also achieved a direction from the Scottish parliament that environmental impact assessments (EIAs) are mandatory for all large-scale data centres over 50MV.

Success in Northern Ireland

There has been good levels of engagement with the OEP post-Brexit. There have been some important legal victories (e.g. 'No Gas Caverns' and the Diesel Emissions cases).

Success in the Republic of Ireland

Access to environmental information requests and using existing mechanisms to identify gaps in government decision-making about the environment have facilitated a number of successful outcomes in Ireland. For example, information requests have assisted with analysis of climate plans, helping to locate gaps and inconsistencies.

Success in England

Following sustained campaigning efforts and lobbying from communities, North Yorkshire Council rejected a planning application to carry out fracking in the town Burniston. This largely came down to the very strong community opposition – a lot of people from the local community made public submissions at the hearing which eventually shifted political will.

Strategies from all jurisdictions

- Recognise the importance of empowerment as a tool – bringing people together, sharing information and strategies, and communicating challenges in different jurisdictions. There is strength in using this knowledge to challenge the picture that the UK is painting at international conventions.
- Take more of an active role in EU and UN meetings to counter what the UK is saying if incorrect and ensure a realistic picture and voice is presented.
- Take time to reflect on the wider impacts of success and the work that CSOs do.

- Reinforce links between environmental, social, and climate justice, and apply a human rights-focused lens to all work that we do – it is important to connect CSO/ENGO work to the lived experience and concerns of people.
- Advocate for the development of training programmes for public authorities involved in environmental decision-making, including the judiciary.
- Engaging with environmental public authorities, like the OEP, ESS, and OEGW can be valuable to ensure they are exercising their remit for environmental justice and scrutinising the government.
    - Rights of Nature can be a valuable tool to give people a vision based on their daily lived experience of nature and how they can protect it. Also using DIY approaches, where lawyers intervene and act as 'river guardians' during legal proceedings. This can also pave the way for sharing specialist, local, ecological knowledge with decision-making bodies in planning proceedings and at local levels.
- Given the pressures on the ACCC and the Aarhus Convention as a whole, we should move the pressure away from international institutions and re-shift the focus in arguments before domestic courts from international to domestic law on fundamental and constitutional rights.
- Remain focused on the direction of travel for environmental justice campaigns – don't just focus on what's happening right in front of you.
- Engage and do outreach with communities – as holders of specialist knowledge and procedural rights, it is important that CSOs exercise their duty to the public and communities.



Workshop participants at the Grassmarket Community Centre, Edinburgh 23.09.26

An E/W environmental rights forum?

We asked participants: What would an environmental rights forum do? What would be its added value? What would be its potential impact? Is this a CSO forum or would it be open to communities/lawyers/academics/others?

"What this event has opened my eyes to is the fact that our experiences in Scotland are not occurring in isolation from the other parts of the UK- in fact they are mirrored in the work challenges of other organisations. A forum will provide the means to bring these experiences (and frustrations) together and begin taking collective action informed by everyone's expertise."Preslava Todorova, ERCS.

There were various opinions from participants about what an environmental forum could do. Generally, it was viewed that its establishment would be useful given concerns that the UK is not representing a complete picture of Aarhus compliance in each jurisdiction. A recurring environmental rights forum could be used by CSOs to share updates about Aarhus implementation and challenges in each jurisdiction. However, it was also acknowledged that if the forum was limited to information and knowledge exchanges, it could lose direction and diminish the returns. The forum could therefore be timed and aligned with important moments for environmental rights, such as before upcoming UN meetings, or before the next Aarhus Meeting of the Parties. It could then feed information to the UK government from each jurisdiction. The Environmental Rights forum could also go wider in its scope and address a range of issues related to rights extending beyond the Aarhus Convention, however that would need to be decided for any future environmental rights forum. There was also support for expanding the forum to include CSO partners from the island of Ireland.

Concerning the practicalities of organising an environmental forum, participants noted that a designated spokesperson or organisation would be required to organise each year, which leads to questions about funding and capacity. The funding for this forum came from a scoping grant from the Northern Ireland Government, and it is unclear where funding for any future forum would come from. However, funding issues could potentially be avoided by keeping any future forum informal.

"There is a need for cross-jurisdictional information sharing and collaborative working to put pressure on the UK Government to help uphold the environmental rule of law."- Declan Owens, ClientEarth.

There are already some existing forums between CSOs for addressing access to justice issues- such as one with Wildlife Countryside Link who has recently collaborated to respond to various judicial review reforms consultations in England. A similar collaboration which comes together at a certain moment where needed could be an effective model for an E/W environmental rights forum. The forum would create opportunities and spaces for CSOs to work together to challenge power.

It was agreed that an environmental forum would be very valuable. This one-day scoping workshop showed the benefits of collaboration, convening and strategising to improve and enhance Aarhus rights.

It also highlighted a potential lacuna whereby the UK government is reporting to the UN on Aarhus issues in absence of true engagement with devolved jurisdictions. A well-established forum with a clear mandate and persuasive asks and findings could be potentially influential with the government. It could also be a place to address transboundary environmental issues between jurisdictions. A forum could also have added value to wider society and community networks, by communicating access to justice issues and translating complex information into simplified terms.

"Yes, a useful think-tank of experts analysing the structural barriers to environmental justice and develop strategies to address those barriers and to out government neglect." Dean Blackwood, The Gathering.

The configuration of any future environmental rights forum was discussed in some detail. However, the ambit of the forum would need to be set in clear terms before making any of those decisions, as different configurations would of course be needed to meet different needs. There were questions raised about whether to include government authorities in the forum, as this could potentially limit the freedom of CSOs to speak openly about Aarhus issues – particularly if the forum is directly challenging the views of those in that position.

Recommendation: A civil society-led E/W environmental rights forum should be established to analyse and address structural barriers to environmental justice and feed coordinated responses into national and international oversight processes.

Next steps

The publication of this report, integrating the insightful and in-depth conversations that took place on the day and that was fed back into the evaluation forms is the next priority following this initial environmental rights forum scoping workshop. EJNI and ERCS will coordinate with participating organisations and explore the potential for proposals about draft terms of reference for any future forum. Any decision concerning a reoccurring environmental forum will need to be guided with a clear vision about what the forum is and what it will do, as well as the key actions it will take to achieve the most impact and hold the UK government to account on the Aarhus Convention.