



The launch of a new Environment Rights Centre for Scotland

20 January 2020

Many people in Scotland suffer from a polluted environment, particularly those in poorer communities, and across Scotland environmental crises of climate change, biodiversity loss, toxic air and plastic pollution are becoming ever more pressing. There is a growing and increasingly complex body of environmental law in Scots law - some of it world-leading - and at the EU and international level that attempts to address aspects of these problems.

However, significant barriers of cost, uncertainty and technicalities exist for communities and individual citizens in Scotland, as well as environmental and social NGOs, who suffer from a polluted environment and want to do something about it.

This is why LINK's Legal Strategy Group, led by Mary Church, is launching an Environmental Rights Centre for Scotland, supported by the Joseph Rowntree Charitable Trust, as a means of enabling and supporting communities and non government organisations to act action to protect the environment.

This new centre has been set up to:

- deliver public legal education enabling individuals, communities and eNGOs to understand better and access their legal rights and responsibilities in relation to the environment;
- offer advice and assistance on planning and environmental law to individuals, communities and eNGOs;
- advocate for reform for a legal system that is fit for purpose, including compliance with the UNECE Aarhus Convention, as environmental law becomes increasingly complex and environmental problems such as climate change, biodiversity loss and air pollution become increasingly pressing; and
- pursue strategic litigation where necessary to secure progress on key environmental issues.

In working to achieve this long term purpose, our short term plan is to establish a stand-alone SCIO (a form of Scottish charity) with its own Board of Trustees to oversee the work of the Centre. When this is up and running, management of the Centre will transfer from LINK to the new body.

At the same time, our two new members of staff, Shivali Fifield, Development Manager and Ian Cowan, Programme Manager, will focus on developing and agreeing a strategy for the Centre's development, including its phased establishment and growth.

LINK is a Scottish Charity (SC000296) and a Scottish Company Limited by guarantee (SC250899). LINK is core funded by Membership Subscriptions and by grants from Scottish Natural Heritage, Scottish Government and Charitable Trusts.

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Mary Church, Head of Campaigns at Friends of the Earth Scotland and Convenor of LINK's Legal Strategy Group said:

"As the interconnected crises of climate change, biodiversity loss, toxic air and plastic pollution become ever more pressing, Scotland's environment urgently needs defending in the corridors of power and the courts of law. Our new Environmental Rights Centre will play a vital role in supporting citizens and NGOs to stand up for the environment, and help break down the barriers to public interest litigation."

Shivali, the Centre's new Development Manager, said:

'As a lifelong environmentalist and campaigner against inequality, I'm really excited to be appointed as the development manager for the ERCS. There has never been a more important time to have an independent organisation that can advocate for the right to live in a clean and healthy environment for everyone. I look forward to building links with community groups, organisations and existing networks to ensure that the ERCS will be that advocate.'

Ian, the Centre's new Programme Manager, said:

"Scotland does lots of things really well - but environmental justice has never been one of them. After 7 years of working freelance to help community groups address the gaps, I'm delighted to be a part of the team that will now systematically take on that task, so that people all over Scotland can at last fully secure their environmental rights."

Find out more about ERCS here: <https://www.scotlink.org/setting-up-a-new-environmental-rights-centre-in-scotland/>

Stay in touch with our plans here: <https://www.scotlink.org/our-work/our-society/legal-strategy/>

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