

Laidlaw Blog

For my LIA, I worked with Opportunity Green, an Environmental Law NGO. For six weeks I worked on a project that aims to make public interest environmental law cases more accessible for small island states that are most vulnerable to climate change. Opportunity Green looks at how law can be used to address the impacts of climate change, or push governments to take more action on the issue. I learned so much over the course of my LIA about leadership, advocacy and empathy, and had an amazing experience working alongside the Opportunity Green team and other academics, NGOs and government bodies working to combat climate change.

For my project, I put together guidance for governments of Small Island Developing States (SIDS), NGOs and legal practitioners on the ability of SIDS to use the UN Convention on the Law of the Sea to bring large polluter states to court for endangering the countries and their populations by releasing large levels of emissions, accelerating the impacts of climate change on Island states. I analysed the law in this area, academic and practical commentary on this area and past cases taken by SIDS on climate change. It was important to establish the case based on the needs of SIDS, as voiced by their own population. Over the course of my LIA, I learned a lot about the importance of listening when it comes to advocacy and leadership. Through Opportunity Green's connections with other NGOs, I got to attend a conference and the UN International Maritime Organisation's Marine Environment Protection Committee (MEPC 78) negotiations. During these two events, I got to listen to delegates from SIDS and NGOs working to promote the interest of climate-vulnerable communities and advocate for their interests in the drafting of legislation. I learned the importance of empathy in leadership – many of the delegates were incredible communicators and advocates but put their own interests first and don't compromise. Yes, it is important to advocate for your own community, but it taught me a lot about how someone can be an effective leader in one sense, but not look out for minority groups. It taught me that leadership can come in many forms, and that values-based and empathetic leadership is important to me.

Learning firsthand what the delegates and governments from SIDS were up against at the IMO gave me a new sense of urgency with my piece. To hear directly from those impacted by climate change was evocative. Delegates of these countries spoke with such passion and urgency, it really solidified the need for climate action, and fast. The week at MEPC taught me a lot about leadership. It showed me that there are different kinds of effective leaders, and that no one trait can define an effective leader. Some are steadfast in their views and objectives, others willing to compromise – some great leaders were a combination of both. It was a great interest in what motivates different leaders – the common good, the objectives of their own people above all else, empathy, stubbornness, alliances – I learnt so much about what can influence a leader's decisions.

Following my time at the MEPC, I finalized the write up of my guidance for potential litigation for climate-vulnerable states under the UN Convention on the Law of the Sea. I found, having heard the first-hand accounts of these nations, I was more motivated to help find a solution. Throughout my six weeks I learnt that there are so many ways to advocate for those in need. I got to bring my legal skills, formed by my course, and my research skills,

formed in my first year Laidlaw project, to the table. This was great as I previously hadn't gotten to combine the two different skill sets. However, I found that the most successful form of advocacy (to me, anyway) was platforming those who have experienced the issue you are trying to address – especially in settings with influential people. I hope to bring these lessons into my work life and my research as I continue.