Time matters to environmental law: the nature of time and time in nature

Professor Benjamin J. Richardson, University of Tasmania; and Tilburg University’s Global Law Visiting Chair 2017

About the lecture:

Time is fundamental to human affairs, including environmental decision-making. The upheavals of the Anthropocene reflect growing discrepancies between human and natural time scales. The complex rhythms and nested time scales of natural processes (e.g., seasonal, organic, climatic, successional) often bear little resemblance to the invariant, industrial clock time that dominates human society. The law is complicit in this dissonance in myriad ways. It compresses time through fast-track legislation and accelerated resource exploitation. It suffers from temporal inertia, such as 'grandfathering' existing activities that limits the law's responsiveness to changing circumstances. Insouciance about past ecological damage, and neglect of its restoration, are equally serious temporal flaws in the law: sustainably will remain elusive while Earth remains degraded and unrepaired. With international perspectives of these issues, this lecture explains why time matters, and how the theory and practice of environmental law can be recast to respect nature’s temporalities. The lecture draws on the speaker’s forthcoming book, Time and Environmental Law: Telling Nature’s Time (Cambridge University Press, 2017).

About the speaker:

Living on the Australian island of Tasmania, birthplace of the world's first Green Party and many fascinating legal and political struggles over the natural environment, Benjamin J. Richardson is a Professor of Environmental Law at the University of Tasmania, and in 2017 the Global Law Visiting Chair at Tilburg University. Earlier, he held the Canada Research Chair in Environmental Law & Sustainability at the University of British Columbia, and before then academic positions at the law faculties of York University (Canada), the University of Manchester and the University of Auckland. Professor Richardson has expertise in diverse subjects including Indigenous peoples and the law, ethical investing, and corporate social responsibility. His 10 books include Socially Responsible Investment Law (Oxford University Press, 2008) and Environmental Law for Sustainability (Hart Publishing, 2006). Professor Richardson’s global recognition includes winning the Research Excellence Prize of the UN Principles for Responsible Investment Academic Network and the Senior Scholar Prize of the IUCN Academy of Environmental Law. He is a member of numerous professional and community groups, including the Australian Panel of Experts of Environmental Law, and he practices eco-stewardship on his Tasmanian sanctuary, Blue Mountain View.