

Centre for Law and the Environment, UCC

Law and the Environment 2025

21st Annual Conference

Thursday, 1 May 2025

Reframing Environmental Law for Accountability, Circularity, Sustainability and Justice

Call for Papers

The 21st edition of the annual *Law and the Environment Conference* at University College Cork (UCC) will focus on the subtle, yet fundamental changes currently taking place (or urgently required) in the form, function and fabric of modern environmental law. These range from the ongoing, incremental transition to a circular economy evident in recent developments relating to the marketing of plastics and the management of plastics waste, to the inexorable rise to prominence of a variety of forms of environmental rights with diverse origins and implications. With the elaboration of radically new regulatory frameworks for climate action, nature restoration and sustainable management of environmentally harmful activities and materials, concerns arise to ensure a just transition which can minimise negative impacts and address inequality, vulnerability and opportunity. However, concern is also growing that certain novel regulatory frameworks may largely be “performative” or “gestural” in character. In addition, not all legal developments will necessarily be regarded as progressive. For example, Ireland’s new Planning and Development Act 2024, in seeking to ensure finality in planning decisions and to safeguard the viability of key infrastructure projects, might apply to curtail broad public participation in decision-making and/or access to justice.

Any exploration of such issues, which are so central to maturing environmental law frameworks and which arise at every level of environmental governance (national, EU, international and transnational), is inextricably linked to recurring questions regarding effective compliance, review, enforcement, responsibility and remedy.

This year’s conference therefore seeks to highlight and explore the legal origins, normative features and potential implications of some of the most important governance concepts, values and regulatory approaches informing the continuing evolution of environmental law. The conference organisers welcome proposals for papers / presentations reflecting upon the ongoing “reframing” of environmental law.

Possible topics might include, *inter alia*:

- Legal bases in international and constitutional law for emerging climate and environmental rights, as well as for putative rights of nature;
- Manifestations of environmental justice, including access to justice arrangements, just transition safeguards, or questions of equitable access to resources and services;
- Challenges to environmental justice, including punitive legal costs regimes, restrictive rules on standing, or SLAPP (strategic lawsuits against public participation) litigation;
- Developments in the transition towards a circular economy, including measures for the management of plastics and other harmful materials throughout every stage of their lifecycle;
- Prospective challenges facing effective implementation of nature restoration regimes;
- Novel forms of sustainability governance, including transnational regulatory frameworks and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

Notwithstanding the tentative suggestions above, the *Law and the Environment Conference* aims, as always, to be as open and inclusive as possible. Therefore, proposals will be welcomed on any topic relating, even indirectly, to the broad theme of “reframing” the modern frameworks of environmental law, governance and regulation.

In addition, the Conference Programme will, as usual, include the well-established specialist sessions covering contemporary developments in such areas as:

- *Land-Use / Planning Law*;
- *Marine Environmental Law*;
- *Corporate Environmental Law*;
- *Climate & Energy Law*;
- *Fisheries & Aquaculture Law*;
- *Nature & Biodiversity Law*;
- *Heritage Protection Law*;
- *Disaster Risk Governance*; and/or
- *Environmental Compliance, Enforcement & Liability*.

[Please note that, unlike in previous years, it may not be possible for UCC to cover speakers’ travel and/or accommodation costs.]

Proposals for papers / presentations should be forwarded as soon as possible (and before the deadline of **28 February 2025**) to the Conference Convenor, Prof Owen McIntyre, at:

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