

CENTRE FOR ENVIRONMENTAL LAW  
MACQUARIE UNIVERSITY  
BIODIVERSITY LAW SPECIALIST GROUP  
IUCN WCEL

-----  
**TERRA/AQUEOUS:  
VEXING VENTS AND  
AMPHIBIOUS LEGALITIES  
IN THE ANTHROPOCENE**  
-----

**Law and Nature Dialogue Webinar Series**



@MacquarieCEL  
@iucn\_wcel

Photo by [Bailey Heedick](#) on [Unsplash](#)

**A/Prof. Surabhi Ranganathan | 19 April 2022, 5pm (Sydney time)**

**Session Chair : Dr Michelle Lim**

This talk uses the ‘vexing’ liminality of ocean vents to think about how the law of the sea, and ongoing law-making processes, imagine and configure ocean space and ecologies. It begins with an account of the surprising discovery of vents in the late 1970s, at a time when negotiations over the 1982 UN Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS) were heading to a close. Vents, being both mineral-rich formations of manganese, copper, iron, nickel, cobalt, gold and silver, and densely inhabited by unique ecosystems (now much sought by biotech and pharmaceutical industries), were a potential gamechanger for these negotiations. They called into question the abstractions and classifications between land and water, life and matter, and mobility and immobility upon which the new law of the sea was being founded. But the discovery came a shade too late, and vents are, if at all, only obliquely comprehended in the UNCLOS text. Their growing importance, not least to different types of extractive interests, has spurred fresh efforts to better describe, classify and regulate the deep ocean. The ongoing processes vis-à-vis Biodiversity Beyond National Jurisdiction at the UN and seabed mining at the International Seabed Authority seek to absorb vents within suitably tailored regimes that can make sense of the particular ways in which new scientific knowledge confronts the existing law of the sea. However, as I will argue, both processes amount to legal ‘fixes’ that discount the potential that vents offer to open up how we approach the ocean, its history and political economy.

**REGISTER HERE to receive Zoom link :**

<https://www.eventbrite.com.au/e/law-nature-dialogues-with-assoc-prof-surabhi-ranganathan-tickets-308049844377>



**WCEL**  
WORLD COMMISSION ON ENVIRONMENTAL LAW  
COMMISSION MONDIALE DE DROIT DE L'ENVIRONNEMENT  
COMISION MUNDIAL DE DERECHO AMBIENTAL

# A/Prof. Surabhi Ranganathan

---

Surabhi Ranganathan is Associate Professor, Faculty of Law, University of Cambridge and Co-Acting Director of the Lauterpacht Centre for International Law.

Surabhi Ranganathan's current work traces the co-constitution of international law and the ocean from 1945 to now, unsettling what we take as the givens in relation to the spatial zones, resource allocations and functional jurisdictions effected by the law of the sea. It extends the history and critique of international law into new areas, such as ocean depths and bottoms, global commons, marine infrastructures, and techno-utopian imaginaries, and, from the underexplored vantage point of oceanic law-making, throws new light on current preoccupations of international legal histories: statehood and territory, decolonization and the new international economic order, the Cold War, race and empire, and the emergence of new legal forms and institutions.

