

FUTURE DIRECTIONS IN THE LAW OF THE SEA: A INTRODUCTION

Every now and again a topic becomes “hot” and becomes the focus of academic and political debate. This subject benefits from an infusion of energy, resources and brain power. This is not currently the case with law of the sea, especially in New Zealand. It is now over 20 years since the United Nations Law of the Sea Convention was negotiated. This development was justly hailed at the time as one of the most significant developments in international law with the potential to ease a number of long-lasting conflicts. It had taken ten years to negotiate and international lawyers perceived that the Convention was a masterpiece of compromise, elegantly codifying international law while also developing the law in ways unforeseen by many at the time. In the early 1980s, there was a sense that lawyers could now breathe easy, and turn their attention to other areas of international law.

However, that sense of ease does not remain today. On a Saturday in September 2004, over 60 people gathered at Victoria University of Wellington Law School for a symposium entitled “Future Directions in the Law of the Sea”. The symposium brought together speakers from New Zealand, Australia and the Pacific to discuss issues related to the law of the sea. The symposium was sponsored by the Australia New Zealand Society for International Law and the New Zealand Centre for Public Law. The interest from the public and the government sector was high, indicating that the topic is, for many people, just as “hot” as it ever was. However, a common complaint by participants was that insufficient attention is paid to oceans issues by academics and government in New Zealand. The symposium offered a welcome opportunity to debate current problems and identify future prospects for oceans law. It became clear that there are many potential partnerships that could be created among academics and others in order to progress the law of the sea.

We are pleased, therefore, to be able to publish articles that emerged from some of the papers presented at the symposium, in the hope that they will promote debate in New Zealand and elsewhere. The report of the symposium gives a flavour of the many issues discussed and the enthusiasm that the participants brought to the dialogue. It is my hope that the symposium, and the papers published in this edition of the Victoria University of Wellington Law Review, will contribute to a continuing healthy debate about the law of the sea.

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Symposium Editor

