

Professor Elizabeth Macpherson

Kaupeka Ture | Law

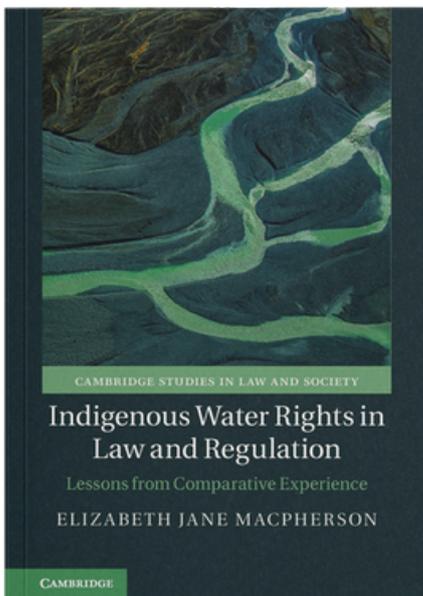
Legal Frameworks for Climate Action

Until now, New Zealand's climate policy has focused on offsetting the impacts of climate change through planting trees. However, coastal and wetland ecosystems, of which Aotearoa New Zealand abounds, are increasingly understood to provide stable, effective, durable and profitable carbon sinks, offering a 'nature-based solution' to climate change. Despite being surrounded by sea territory 15 times greater than our landmass, Blue Carbon is not currently included in New Zealand's Emissions Trading Scheme

and there are unresolved legal questions about how coastal planning and Māori land tenure aligns with climate action. Elizabeth's research foregrounds Tiriti partnerships, Māori protected rights, relationships and rangatiratanga across marine and coastal areas. She advocates for environmentally and socially transformative research during these disruptive times.

"Aotearoa has the chance to devise bold environmental policies for tailored implementation across the globe; if we act now with deliberation and care, our example will make waves."

Before coming to UC, Elizabeth used her legal training and policy expertise in varied practices in Aotearoa New Zealand, Chile, and Australia. Throughout her career she has worked in partnership with Māori iwi and hapū and First Nations peoples internationally. Through her research and advocacy she works to transform environmental law frameworks while upholding Indigenous rights and knowledge systems. As examples, she has researched the rights of rivers as 'legal persons' under the authority of Indigenous peoples, and led a large interdisciplinary team reviewing complex marine legislation in Aotearoa New Zealand for the Sustainable Seas National Science Challenge. This research aims to embed an ecosystem-based approach in decision-making across multiple marine and coastal laws and policies.



Her 2019 book, *Indigenous water rights in law and regulation: Lessons from comparative experience* (pictured left), published by Cambridge University Press won the 2020 Law and Society Association of Australia and New Zealand prize for most outstanding book. She also won the 2021 Royal Society Te Apārangi Early Career Research Excellence Award for Humanities for this work. It is held in approximately 250 libraries worldwide and has been integrated into judicial and postgraduate training.

More broadly, Elizabeth's research has been cited in documents by and for policymakers in Aotearoa New Zealand, Australia, Canada and Germany and by Intergovernmental Organisations including the World Bank and the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (UNECE). Taken together, the recognition and reach of this work speaks to her global research impact.

About Elizabeth

- PhD in Law
- Lawyer (2004-2016), including in Aotearoa New Zealand and Australia
- Started as Lecturer at UC in 2017



Research Impact

Elizabeth's research impact ethos is one that foregrounds Tiriti relationships and works at the nexus of where environmental, climate, and Indigenous rights challenges converge. Through long-term collaborations, she aims to align her research to community needs and priorities. A focus on legal frameworks provides an important basis for ensuring systemic and widespread policy transformation for sustainable ecosystems. In the context of climate change, Elizabeth's work tackles unprecedented global challenges that are not currently addressed by existing legal and policy frameworks, such as in the area of coastal climate adaptation and Blue Carbon mitigation.

