Research Handbook on Law, Governance and Planetary Boundaries
Research Handbooks in Environmental Law series
Edited by Duncan French, Pro Vice Chancellor of the College of Social Science and Professor of International Law, University of Lincoln, UK and Louis J. Kotzé, Research Professor, North-West University, South Africa and Senior Professorial Fellow in Earth System Law, University of Lincoln, UK

This comprehensive Research Handbook is the first study to link law and Earth system science through the epistemic lens of the planetary boundaries framework. It critically examines the legal and governance aspects of the framework, considering not only each planetary boundary, but also a range of systemic issues, including the ability of law to keep us within the planetary boundaries’ safe operating space.

‘The planetary boundaries concept provides an ideal framework for connecting science with law at the global level. This book explores this connection in great detail, from our undeniable need for limits and the fundamental concepts of ethics, justice and governance to the comprehensive assessment of the legal implications of each of the individual boundaries.’
– Will Steffen, The Australian National University, Australia

‘Co-edited by Duncan French and Louis Kotzé – two of the foremost scholars in the field of environmental law in the era of the Anthropocene – this Research Handbook is the first comprehensive attempt to investigate, from a legal perspective, the human dimensions of scientific concepts of planetary boundaries. The book brings together a fascinating series of contributions from some of the leading legal thinkers in the field. At a time when raging fires and other “unprecedented” environmental disasters are providing increasing evidence of the consequences of failing to respect planetary limits, this book is a timely and important reminder of the contribution that can be made by law in ensuring that humanity and our environment remain within the planet’s “safe operating space”.
– Jacqueline Peel, University of Melbourne, Australia

‘If international environmental law is to stay relevant in the face of overwhelming evidence of its inability to address the galloping environmental harms humanity is witnessing, it needs to embrace a fundamental reset of its premises, conceptual pillars, and governance models. Such a reset requires imagination – imagination that is outrageous in its ambition and fuelled by outrage. This Research Handbook, edited by two of the finest international environmental law scholars of our time, Duncan French and Louis Kotzé, is a work of such outrageous imagination. It challenges legal boundaries in its quest to protect planetary ones, and in so doing takes us closer to law and governance fit for environmental purpose.’
– Lavanya Rajamani, University of Oxford, UK

‘In the last two decades, a growing body of transdisciplinary research has brought to light the immense impact of certain human processes not just on “history” but on the Earth system. Yet, lawyers and legal researchers have remained conspicuously absent from this major effort, despite the very significant role that legal organisations play in enabling and, we must hope, controlling such impact. This ground-breaking volume fleshes out, for the first time, what law means for the Earth-shaping human processes that have come to characterise our epoch, the Anthropocene.’
– Jorge Viñuales, University of Cambridge, UK

‘A comprehensive, nuanced and expert examination of how international environmental law
and governance should reflect the planetary boundaries that we are rapidly approaching or have already begun to violate, this volume could not be more timely. With interdisciplinary contributions from scholars in a wide variety of fields, the book is both an introduction of the concept of planetary boundaries to those who are not familiar with it, and a detailed exploration of its legal ramifications. It will be a foundational text for all future work in this area.’

‘Duncan French and Louis Kotzé have assembled a must-read primer for anyone researching the legal context to the planet’s environmental boundaries under unprecedented stress. Read this book for an accessible, insightful and comprehensive account from some of the world’s foremost scholars of environmental law.’
– Benjamin J. Richardson, University of Tasmania, Australia

‘This collection is a profound and deep meditation by an esteemed panel of authors on the role of law at a time of extreme risk and uncertainty. As the planet’s capacity to uphold life support systems becomes increasingly tenuous, the law is invoked to provide the normative and regulatory frameworks to constrain human behaviour. By reflecting on law as an instrument of governance, the authors question how to facilitate a convergence between planetary and legal boundaries. This might include a focus on responsibilities rather than rights, on Indigenous knowledge and the Rights of Nature. The editors are to be congratulated for stimulating these insightful responses.’
– Rosemary Lyster, University of Sydney, Australia

‘By now well into the Anthropocene, human societies are running up against the limits of what the Earth system can sustain. This excellent volume offers a thought-provoking and engaging set of reflections on the natural, conceptual and intellectual dimensions of our planetary boundaries, and on the capacity of international environmental law to articulate and protect them. A compelling, indispensable addition to the Research Handbook series.’
– Jutta Brunnée, University of Toronto, Canada

‘This is a welcome overview of existing efforts and future possibilities of legally regulating activities that threaten to violate the biophysical conditions for human survival in the Anthropocene. The chapters systematically review the ways in which national and international law can be applied to keep humanity within the so-called planetary boundaries that define the Earth’s “safe operating space”. In interweaving natural-science insights on the Earth system with legal options and ethical perspectives, this volume outlines feasible reforms and offers hope.’
– Alf Hornborg, Lund University, Sweden