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Introduction - Ecology Law Currents

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Introduction

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Once again, Boalt Hall's *Ecology Law Quarterly* is breaking new ground in the provision of timely and useful legal analysis on environmental topics. We are pleased to introduce *Ecology Law Currents*, an online journal that will provide the opportunity to see the views of several authors on topics of current interest. This first issue, exploring the important question whether nuclear power can and should be part of the solution to climate stabilization, allows *ELQ* to provide a variety of views without requiring the many months that normal law journal writing and editing consumes. The new format will provide access to this interesting debate more quickly, and regular updates of this sort of debate are also possible as new information becomes available. Plainly the purpose is not to displace more rigorous legal analysis of important environmental legal topics, but rather to provide a new and more accessible introduction to current issues, some of which may then be followed up with more traditional articles in *ELQ* or other journals.

There could not be a more timely and important topic for exploration in this new format. Climate stabilization absolutely depends on a successful transition away from the dominant role that combustion of fossil fuels now has in the provision of energy to drive the economies of the world, and while improved energy efficiency and development of renewable energy sources will undoubtedly play an important role in this transition, it is far from clear that these solutions will be sufficient. Nuclear power is advocated as part of the solution because of its unique ability to provide large amounts of energy in a relatively small space with a minimum emission of greenhouse gasses. While there is no question that nuclear power is expensive and capital intensive, it may prove economic if the world is serious about internalizing the cost of carbon emissions for those generation technologies that cannot avoid them. As the articles in this first issue of *Ecology Law Currents* indicates, there are many legitimate concerns about the economics of nuclear power and the

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safety of making the world dependent on it. The question that remains is whether there really are viable alternatives.

The Harding piece ends by noting that developments in solar generation must give those who are considering investment in nuclear facilities pause because capital-intensive nuclear units that require years to license and construct could be rendered uneconomic before they even generate a single kilowatt-hour. Let us hope that Harding is correct that we can afford to pass on the nuclear option and avoid the safety concerns, waste disposal problems, and possible proliferation of weapons materials that accompany it. Until it is clear that other technologies are available to deliver cost-effective carbon-free energy to the world's consumers and industries, we can expect this debate to continue. *Ecology Law Currents* is now available as a vehicle for keeping us informed of this and similar ongoing environmental controversies in the coming years.