Public interest or social impact litigation is utilised in many democracies as a vehicle for social, political and legal change. For example, public interest litigation has been successfully employed in the United States to pursue civil rights, as well as in Canada, India and South Africa to end practices of racial and gender discrimination and to ensure rights for Indigenous communities. Issues relating to the environment as well as pursuing the rights of consumers have also been the focus of public interest litigation.

In the past few decades Australia has witnessed an increase in public interest cases with some significant success for plaintiffs.

What is unique about the Australian experience, when compared to the experiences of other jurisdictions like Canada, post-apartheid South Africa, the USA or India, is that Australia has no national Bill of Rights – the instrument that has often animated public interest litigation in those societies.

Despite the absence of an Australian Bill of rights, public interest litigation in Australian courts has, to some extent, reflected the legal victories that have transpired in constitutional democracies in the area of voting rights, the rights of refugees, and environmental issues.

On Thursday 8th August, 2019 La Trobe University School of Law, in collaboration with the Australian Human Rights Institute (UNSW Law) and Grata Fund, will host a conference entitled, Public Interest Litigation in Australia - A Comparative Perspective. The conference is designed to bring together lawyers and advocates who are pursuing innovative litigation strategies, legal academics who write on related topics, judges who adjudicate these issues, and policy makers. The conference aims to consider some of the major public interest cases in Australia and to analyse them in comparative perspective. The conference will feature discussion of Australian cases - and reflection on the issues raised by them in light of comparable cases in other jurisdictions.

It is the hope of the conference organisers that the deliberations and the engagement of all participants will lead to ongoing collaborations.

The following sample of cases is suggested as indicative of landmark Australian public interest law cases for consideration and analysis. While not all of them were successful, they nonetheless raise issues of significant public interest which, in some cases, were pursued and realised via other mechanisms. Proposals that consider other Australian cases, are also welcomed.
Indigenous Rights
- *Mabo and Others v Queensland* (No.2) [1992] HCA 23
- *Kartinyeri v Commonwealth* [1998] HCA22
- *South Australia v Lampard-Trevorrow* [2010] 106 SASR 331

Rights of Refugees
- *Kioa v West* [1985] HCA 81
- *Minister Of State For Immigration And Ethnic Affairs V Ah Hin Teoh* [1995] HCA 20
- *Minister for Immigration & Multicultural & Indigenous Affairs v Al Masri* [2003] FCAFC 70
- *Al-Kateb v Godwin* [2004] HCA 37

Electoral Democracy
- *Lange v Australian Broadcasting Corporation* [1997] HCA 25
- *Levy v Victoria* [1997] HCA 31
- *Roach v Electoral Commissioner* [2007] HCA 43
  *Rowe v Electoral Commissioner* [2010] HCA 46

Discrimination
- *AIS v Banovic* [1989] 168 CLR 165
- *Croome & Toonen v State of Tasmania* [1997] 71 ALR 397
- *Eatock v Bolt* [2011] FCA 1103

Environmental Justice
- *Commonwealth v Tasmania (Tasmanian Dam Case)* [1983] 158 CLR 1
- *Oshlack v Richmond River Council* [1998] HCA
- *Gray v Minister for Planning* [2006] NSWLEC 720

We invite those interested in presenting a paper at the conference to send a 600-word proposal to Professor Penelope Andrews at penelope.andrews@nyls.edu by 29th April 2019. Participants will be notified by 10th May 2019 whether their proposals have been accepted.

Selected papers from the conference will be published in the Spring/Summer of 2020. Please indicate in your proposal whether you intend to submit a formal paper for publication.

Conference presenters are responsible for their own travel costs. The conference will provide a discounted hotel rate as well as meals.