New Zealand has incorporated ideas of vulnerability within its law of negligence for some years. It has not, however, clarified what is meant by vulnerability or the role the concept plays within the broader duty of care framework. Several obiter comments in Body Corporate No 207624 v. North Shore City Council (Spencer on Byron) suggest the concept ought not to be part of the law due to its uncertain and confusing nature. Subsequent cases have, however, continued to use the concept, and continue to
use it despite both its historically ill-defined nature and the additional uncertainty added by Spencer on Byron. This essay argues that vulnerability can and ought to be a part of New Zealand negligence law. With a consistent adoption of a single test for vulnerability—that established in the High Court of Australia in Woolcock Street Investments Pty. Ltd. v. CDG Pty. Ltd. (Woolcock)—vulnerability can be a conceptually certain concept that provides useful insight into the issues posed by the law of negligence.

"The Law of Private Nuisance Following Wu: Emanation and Access"

Victoria University of Wellington Legal Research Paper, Student/Alumni Paper No. 35/2016

MATTHEW MAZENIER, Victoria University of Wellington, Faculty of Law, Student/Alumni
Email: matthew.mazenier@xtra.co.nz

The boundaries of nuisance have traditionally been tightly guarded. However, the tort’s underlying concern for the protection of property rights has provided it with sufficient flexibility to adapt to changing social and legal circumstances. The New Zealand Court of Appeal’s decision in Body Corporate 366611 v Wu represents the extension of private nuisance to remedy gaps in the tort’s application to the relationship between body corporates and individual proprietors under the Unit Titles Act 1972. The case concerned the defendant Body Corporate’s denial of access to an individual proprietor with an interest in the common property from which the nuisance ‘emanated’. Though the Court erred in its interpretation of existing nuisance principles relating to emanation, its decision can be rationalised on the basis that the plaintiff’s lack of control and restricted access speak to the core interests protected by the tort. Given the Court’s finding that access restrictions may be reasonably imposed upon occupiers under the Body Corporate’s modified rules, the decision’s limited effect is to provide an individual proprietor with a figurative right of access. Outside of clarifying these doctrinal uncertainties, the decision does not produce lasting ramifications for private nuisance.

"The New Intrusion Tort: The News Media Exposed?"

Victoria University of Wellington Legal Research Paper, Student/Alumni Paper No. 36/2016

THOMAS MCKENZIE, Victoria University of Wellington, Faculty of Law, Student/Alumni
Email: thomas.levy.mckenzie@gmail.com

In C v Holland, Whata J recognised that the tort of intrusion upon seclusion formed part of New Zealand’s common law. The tort protects against intentional intrusions into a person’s private space. This decision potentially exposes the news media to tortious liability when it engages in intrusive newsgathering practices. However, Whata J’s decision provides little guidance as to how the tort should be applied in later cases. In order to ascertain the meaning of the tort’s formulation, this essay draws upon the methods used, both in New Zealand and internationally, to prevent the news media from breaching individual privacy rights. It then suggests that the courts should replace the formulation with a one-step reasonable expectation of privacy test. It also argues that the legitimate public concern defence should be better tailored to the intrusion context. Finally, it briefly assesses how the intrusion tort should interact with the tort in Hosking v Runting. Ultimately, it concludes that, in future, the courts should reflect more carefully on the precise wording of the intrusion tort’s formulation so that it best vindicates the interests that it was designed to protect.

"Negligence on the Job: All Care and No Responsibility?"

Victoria University of Wellington Legal Research Paper, Student/Alumni Paper No. 37/2016

YVONNE OLDFIELD, Victoria University of Wellington, Faculty of Law, Student/Alumni
Email: yvonne.oldfield@vuw.ac.nz

In New Zealand the Employment Relations Authority has first instance jurisdiction to determine employment relationship problems involving breaches of employment agreements, including employer claims for damages arising out of employee breaches of express and implied terms of the employment contract. In recent years this has included a small but steady number of breaches of the implied contractual to exercise reasonable skill and care. This paper reviews the current law in respect of such claims along with the related issue of employee liability in tort to third parties such as customers. It shows that the current legal position means that workers with limited say over how when and where their work is done could end up bearing a significant part of the risk associated with that work. It concludes by considering whether it is reasonable for employees to be exposed to this level of risk and suggests that it is not, in fact, consistent with the protective objectives of labour law generally and the Employment Relations Act 2000 in particular. It is suggested that an appropriate response to this might be the introduction of an “indemnity regime” by which employers indemnify employees for losses associated with non-intentional breaches of duty.

"Balancing the Right to Privacy and Freedom of Expression: Re-evaluating Hosking v Runting"
in the Light of Recent Developments in English Privacy Law"  
Victoria University of Wellington Legal Research Paper, Student/Alumni Paper No. 38/2016

Abby Ward, Victoria University of Wellington, Faculty of Law, Student/Alumni  
Email: hoopnu@aol.com

This paper examines the potential impact of recent English privacy jurisprudence on the New Zealand tort of privacy. The paper contrasts the New Zealand Court of Appeal's aversion towards an over-expansive privacy right expressed in Hosking v Runting with an increasing readiness to override freedom of expression in favour of privacy interests in the United Kingdom. Three central conflicts in the courts' reasoning are addressed in detail, namely privacy's relationship with public places, individuals with public profiles and mediums of publication. While developments in English privacy law highlight reasoning flaws and theoretical shortcomings in Hosking, the increasing influence European jurisprudence on English law may nevertheless justify some divergence in the two jurisdictions' balancing of privacy and freedom of expression.

"Local Authority Liability for Flooding: Where Should Loss Fall?"  
Victoria University of Wellington Legal Research Paper, Student/Alumni Paper No. 39/2016

Sean Brennan, Victoria University of Wellington, Faculty of Law, Student/Alumni  
Email: seankbrennan101@gmail.com

Flooding is New Zealand's most frequent natural hazard, the cost of which is outdone only by the recent Canterbury earthquakes. Local authorities are the bodies primarily tasked with protecting communities against flooding through a range of measures including physical works such as stopbanks. This article explores the extent to which a local authority can be liable in tort where those physical works fail, causing damage. Direct liability and non-delegable duties are discussed, the latter addressing whether a local authority can nevertheless be liable having outsourced the construction of flood works to independent contractors. Additionally, whether local authorities should be liable for such damage or whether individual property owners ought to protect their own interests through insurance is discussed. This article recommends that property owners should purchase private insurance, but that local authorities should remain liable at least for their own negligence.

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Northwestern University - Pritzker School of Law, Northwestern University - Kellogg School of Management, European Corporate Governance Institute (ECGI)
Email: bblack@northwestern.edu

RONALD J. GILSON
Stanford Law School, Columbia Law School, European Corporate Governance Institute (ECGI)
Email: rgilson@leland.stanford.edu

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