

IISL COLLOQUIUM ON THE LAW OF OUTER SPACE (E7)  
Balancing Needs: Protection of Space Science (3)

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A WALK IN THE DARK AND THE LAW OF SATELLITE MEGACONSTELLATIONS

**Abstract**

From professional to amateur astronomers, the dark skies represent a window to the universe. For example, the idea of seeing the rings of Saturn may be taken for granted in our present day. Whether from our backyards or millions of miles into the expanse, the distant lights that astronomers observe represent the next frontier of human exploration. We can expect to see multiple human missions to the Moon, tourist hotels, and commercial facilities in orbit mixed with scientific and commercial outposts in the next few decades. However, a newer inhabitant of our space backyard threatens this much-needed future. Could the dark skies be under threat due to the utilization of satellite megaconstellations? Legal and ethical questions arise ranging from humanity's responsibilities towards astronomical observations to the use of outer space and the allocation of scarce resources, to list but a few. This presentation will explore the notion of law and ethics as it applies to the use of outer space and astronomy. The impending frontiers of human exploration will not be easily accessible. With this in mind, as the use of satellite megaconstellations continues to grow and prosper, questions associated with space law begin to emerge. Yet, these questions offer a more significant warning that could intersect planetary protection issues. The world's nations, particularly the emerging commercial space ventures, have a vested interest in protecting astronomical observations. The goal will be to discover how space law may offer guidance and educate satellite operators while identifying possible solutions.