

# BOOK REVIEWS

**CONCISE LEGAL RESEARCH / ROBERT WATT**  
Annandale, N.S.W.: Federation Press, 1993 \$25.00

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In a time when the legal publishing wars for the greatest slice of the market ensure that the bombardment with new titles is constant, the immediate question that leaps to mind is: do we really need another legal research 'how-to-do-it' text? A quick glance at the latest offering from Federation Press, confirms that the answer, in this case at least, is 'yes'.

In his introduction, Robert Watt suggests that a good lawyer is 'one who can find the law quickly, and with the available materials. This is what is meant by concise legal research.' He has applied this standard equally to his own writing, by providing the user with a practical and succinct guide to legal research techniques and resources. Here, in this approach, lies the guide's greatest strength - although it was presumably written with the needs of law students in mind, it will be equally useful for practitioners and librarians who wish to refresh their own information skills or learn new ones.

Many law librarians will be pleased to see that Watt's first chapter comes straight to the cutting edge and deals with citation style. It covers all the expected conventions of citing cases and legislation and has a bonus section on working with CCH citations.

A brief overview is given to the Australian legal system as an introduction to an information environment in which much is made of primary and secondary sources but the guide does not dwell on court hierarchies and legislative process. Rather, Chapters Two and Three deal with legislation and delegated legislation. The associated sequences of these resources are identified and explained. Principal acts are distinguished from amending and reprinted acts. The dates of assent and commencement of

legislation are clearly differentiated. Sunset clauses and impact statements are discussed in plain language.

The chapter on law reports further demystifies potentially confusing aspects of legal research explaining, for example, how official control of reporting is maintained; how cases are selected for reporting; and why some report series are authorised and others are not.

So, the language is clear and the explanations are concise and to the point. However, if it is fair to say that the content of the first five chapters is predictable, this is not so with the second half of the text, which offers Australian legal researchers something quite new: notes on legal research in other common law countries, the United States of America and the European Economic Community.

These areas are treated individually with separate chapters. They provide an introduction to each respective legal system and give notes predominantly on the nature and use of the primary sources and their finding aids for various jurisdictions. The 'key reference sections' in each chapter provide bibliographies of more detailed, specialised legal research guides for useful follow-up reading.

Chapter Eight is devoted to 'finding international law' and is a most welcome inclusion. In it, Watt provides extensive overviews and reading lists of major treaty series and other important digests of international law. Materials concerning the international human rights and trade law are given particular prominence.

There are other general features of this guide which work well. Practical tips for searching words and phrases are provided. Example problems are presented with suggested research strategies and several useful strategic flow charts. The appendix of common case names, based on the Macquarie University Law Library

list, has been updated and it includes a range of cases from those associated with basic legal education, the 'cannibalism' case, to more recent and practical 'land rights' cases and the American 'abortion' cases.

One aspect of this guide that was disappointing was its inconsistent approach to computerised researching. As this has become an accepted part of legal research, the decision to integrate discussion of computerised legal databases and their hosts has much merit. However, the inclusion of this material is patchy. For example, specific sections on computerised research are provided with the guides to Canadian, New Zealand and EEC resources but not for the United States, where it is included in the general discussion of resources. The only mention of Australian online sources that was found was in a passing reference to AGIS being available on SCALE and INFO-ONE, in the section on finding journal articles, in Chapter Five.

For all its strengths, the weakest part of the guide, however, is its index, which detracts from the overall work. Reliance on the index as a

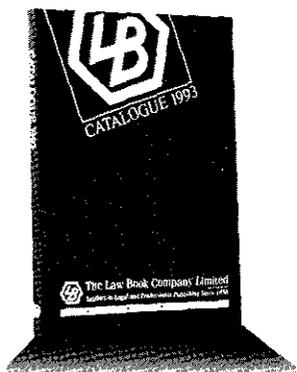
quick entree to specific contents is not successful and clearly inhibits easy access. Several obvious terms, for example LEXIS and 'commencement dates' are missing, as are cross references such as 'journal articles see legal periodicals'. Other headings are given incomplete entries, such as *Australian Case Citator*, which is listed under 'noting-up' but not under 'citators' or its own title.

Given its broader than usual scope, it was surprising to find that no specific coverage was given to Asian legal materials, an obvious growth area for legal information needs. Despite these flaws, *Concise Legal Research* effectively complements the other commonly used Australian legal research guides. Its fresh approach and content ensure that it will become a widely used and valuable resource for law students and the broader legal community.

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