

EDITORIAL

The compilation of the *Australian Law Librarian* is definitely the team effort of the editorial committee, managers and columnists. The current team is one which will go to any length to ensure relevant contributions and this issue is a reflection of their hardwork. One particular columnist emailed me their contribution at 7.30am on a Saturday after working through the night to finish the column - that is what I call dedication. I would like to take this opportunity to thank all the members of the Committee and others involved in the production of this issue, in particular Dianne Thompson, Sandra Burger, Helen Bergoc, Kerrie Millgate and Justin O'Halloran.

This issue covers a broad range of issues including: Research in the Solomon Islands, Total Quality Service in a law firm, the philosophy of the Monash Law Library, a collection of articles on researching medical negligence law and medicine and tools and hints on accounting research. We have also included a number of

shorter articles in this issue on the topics of the launch of the Victorian Hansard on the Internet, the outcomes of the ALTA conference and an expert's hints on leather restoration. We also have a very large and informative Publisher Liaison Column which illustrates the ever increasing co-operation between publishers and the Group.

We look forward to publishing a selection of the papers presented at the Melbourne *Law Library Symposium 1996* in our next issue. This doesn't mean that we are not interested in contributions from other members for that issue so please contact me or another member of the committee if you have something to share.

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LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Dear Editor

Re: Canberra Rules

In his letter in the March edition, David Grainger, the Director of the Attorney-General's Department's SCALE system, provided a very useful update on the Federal Register of Legislative Instruments and supplied the invaluable information that its acronym, FRLI, is to be pronounced frilly.

David took issue with my December column about three points: I had argued that Internet access was not sufficiently widespread to adopt it as a national publication medium; I had said that

the Gazette should have been retained as a publication medium; and I had criticised the short lead-time being given to introduce the new system.

Internet Access

David argues that various developments are putting Internet access within general reach. Certainly its reach is growing fast, but it is nowhere near universal. Furthermore, no matter how good the search software is, a computer terminal in a library is far more forbidding than even a Gazette Index. The point remains that most of our population can read, but not everyone

can use a computer yet, and certainly nowhere like the majority of even the business community have email, let alone full Internet access.

As an example of how far we have to go on this aspect of FRLI's accessibility, I cannot resist pointing out that the Members and Senators of the Parliament of the Commonwealth of Australia still did not have Internet access more than six months after the date that FRLI was to have been the principal medium of publication! (I leave it to readers to contemplate whether and how the Parliament proposes to fulfil its responsibilities for scrutiny using paper or electronic versions of legislative instruments.)

Retention of the Gazette System

No one would argue with David that the present system of publication is less than ideal, or that the FRLI system should be an immense improvement over the Gazettes. Indeed, I had thought that my article made those points. The problem is that shifting from one to the other without running both in parallel is poor project management - unintended consequences are surely etched on the desk of every manager.

The Short Lead Time

It is true that FRLI was not brought into commission on 1 January 1996. That was through no brilliance of the Attorney-General's Department. As late as mid-November 1995, when my article had been completed, the Government was still seeking to have the Bill

passed, presumably with its start-up date of 1 January 1996. At no stage had anyone announced anything different. Had that intended passage been achieved, what libraries would have had Internet access on that date? What schools? Did anyone in the Attorney-General's Department actually know? All that we had were two unfunded promises by the Government, one by Mr Howe, who then retired, the other in the December Innovation Statement, to provide those access facilities over the next three or four years (As I write, just before the Budget, with a new Government, we do not have even that level of assurance, now.) Would the AGPS have had the FRLI paper Index series operating for subscribers by 1 January 1996? How many law firms, libraries, etc would have been able to subscribe to it between the time that AGPS would have got around to putting out its marketing flyer, presumably in early December 1995, after the Bill's passage, and the 1 January start date?

Conclusion

While the concept of FRLI is excellent, it is difficult to avoid the suspicion that the needs of the public have been, at best, secondary to the administrative and financial convenience of the Attorney-General's Department.

Yours sincerely
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Capital Monitor