

Law handbook for release in new year

The Northern Territory's first Law Handbook will go to print late this month and should be ready for distribution in February.

The handbook is being co-edited by Jeremy McArdle and Libby Stewart.

Mr McArdle said the task has been enormous with 70 authors and 30 readers contributing 24 chapters.

The final publication is expected to run to about 660 pages.

Chapters include: an introduction, Legal Documents, Legal Aid, Consumers, Debts, Insurance, Housing, Family, Employment and Superannuation, Neighbourhood Disputes, Land and Environment, Discrimination and Human Rights, Accidents and Injury, Crime, Pensions Benefits

and Allowances, Immigration, Taxation, Complaints about Government and the Police, Wills, Health, Changing a Name, Community Organisations and Business, and Copyright.

The chapter dealing with employment is believed to be the first in a law handbook in Australia to cover superannuation.

The chapter dealing with health will cover the law as it relates to AIDS, also a relative newcomer to law handbooks throughout the country.

Mr McArdle said the handbook would be bound and would be about 10" x 7".

Costs have not yet been finalised, but the handbook is expected to sell for around \$60.

LCA call for Indon reforms

The President of the Law Council of Australia, Robert Meadows, said the capture of the East Timorese "rebel" leader, Xanana Gusmao, made even more urgent the need for Indonesia to reform the laws and rules under which trials are held.

He said the existence of an anti-subversion law and a "hate-sowing" law in such broad and ill-defined terms was incompatible with a proper recognition of basic human rights and universally accepted standards of criminal justice.

Mr Meadows said the Australian Section of the International Commission of Jurists had reported in July this year that Indonesia had breached articles 19 (on the right to freedom of opinion and ideas) and 20 (on the right of peaceful assembly) of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights in permitting prosecutions under the anti-subversion law against defendants whose alleged crimes involved no element of violence but who had sought peacefully to express opinions in relation to the self-determination of East Timor.

The ICJ said the anti-subversion law was capable of absurdly wide interpretation and this would be a serious enough problem even if the penalties were only trivial.

"It is sobering to remember that Francisco Mirando Branco was sentenced to 15 years' imprisonment following the trials arising out of the Dili massacre last year for offences which included making a banner carrying a picture of Xanana Gusmao," Mr Meadows said.

"Now that Xanana Gusmao himself is to be put on trial, the world community should do all it can to impress upon the Indonesian authorities the importance of trials being conducted according to internationally-accepted principles and of defendants being treated in accord with similar principles," he said.

Mr Meadows said he hoped that in the meantime, Xanana Gusmao would be allowed visits from his family and would be treated properly in custody.

Victorian compensation laws criticised by Law Council

The Law Council of Australia has described the Victorian Government's Workcover system as an attack on the fundamental rights of citizens under common law.

The LCA is particularly critical of retrospective legislation dealing with compensation claims.

"For many year, the Law Council has fought against retrospective changes to the law, especially in tax law," the President of the LCA, Robert Meadows, said.

"It has succeeded to the point that the Commonwealth Government now thinks very carefully before proposing changes with retrospective effect, and then makes such changes only where it can provide strong justification.

"It is very disappointing to see the Victorian Government making changes in the compensation system

that will affect the rights of people who have already lodged compensation claims under the rules that applied when they were injured and when they made their claims," he said.

Mr Meadows said the new rules should apply only to new claims.

He said the Law Council was also concerned by the breach of principle involved in abolition of the Victorian Accident Compensation Tribunal apparently without provision for appointment of the judges to a replacement body.

"It is of particular importance that people who have to adjudicate claims against the government or government instrumentalities not be under the threat or apprehension that they might lose their jobs if they do not keep the government of the day happy," he said.