

The young (and not so young) lawyers' bible turns 25!

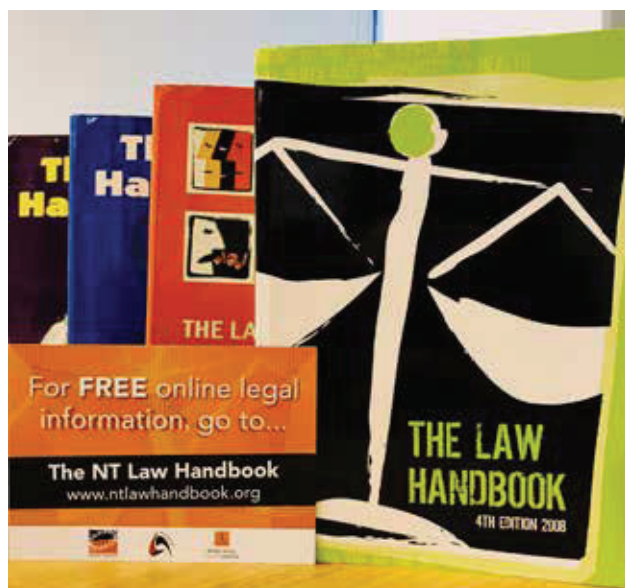
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You have made it! You're now a lawyer and ready to see your first client. Excited and nervous, you start the process: you take your first instructions. Oh no—it's a motor vehicle accident and your client has no insurance, no income, no car and they live rurally. What do you do? You reach for the *NT Law Handbook*.

The *NT Law Handbook*, regarded as the young (and not so young) lawyers' bible, is a reliable source of legal information for the community. It provides comprehensive plain English information on a broad range of legal topics.

On 2 August 2018, at the heritage buildings of Browns Mart Theatre, the NT legal fraternity celebrated 25 years since the first print publication of the handbook. In 1993,



Darwin Community Legal Service (DCLS) and the Northern Territory Legal Aid Commission (NTLAC) published the first edition of the *NT Law Handbook* with 26 chapters, 56 major contributors and 690 pages. By the fourth edition, published in 2008, the handbook had grown to 30 chapters, 117 contributors and almost 1300 pages.

In 2014 and 2015, the Australasian Legal Information Institute (AustLII) joined the existing collaborative partnership and in 2016 the handbook re-emerged as an online publication—the first jurisdiction to bring the lawyers' bible into the digital age using this platform.

At Browns Mart, this milestone was celebrated with friends who have supported this project over the last 25 years. One of the highlights of the evening was a panel discussion with some past notable contributors and committee members: the Hon Deputy Chief Judge Elizabeth Morris, the Hon

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Justice Jenny Blokland, Suzan Cox QC, Melinda Schroeder and Nicki Petrou (facilitator). The panellists shared how they came to be involved with the handbook project and discussed the importance of maintaining accessible legal information for the profession and the general community.

The Hon Elizabeth Morris recalled that in the early 1990s, lawyers in the NT were using law handbooks from other jurisdictions and thought it would be useful to have something similar relevant to the NT jurisdiction. Some interested people put together a committee to manage the project and started work on producing the first *NT Law Handbook*. None of the committee members had published a book before, so there was a lot to learn. Many decisions, big and small, go into publishing a book. Judge Morris recalled walking into bookshops and looking at books which stood out on the shelves to get ideas about what colour the first handbook should be.

The Honourable Justice Jenny Blokland remembered using handbooks from other jurisdictions and talked about how

valuable it is to contribute, as part of the legal community, to something built together. As a project, the *NT Law Handbook* has been supported by its major partners and a range of contributors, editors, production staff and committee members—almost 500 people over the life of the project. As a busy criminal lawyer and contributor to the first two print editions of the handbook, Suzan Cox QC remembered waiting at court one day to give evidence, writing the draft of her chapter longhand, in a notebook balanced on her knees, as she sat at the back of the court room.

When Melinda Schroeder, Manager of the Legal Aid Helpline started working at NTLAC over 22 years ago, the print publication of the handbook was the only resource available to provide information to callers on the helpline. She would photocopy pages and send them out to callers. Melinda was the production coordinator for the final print edition of the handbook, and involved in the project to move the handbook to its current online platform. She continues to use it daily.



Generations of volunteer and staff lawyers at DCLS have relied on the Law Handbook. Even the most versatile lawyer is sometimes faced with an unfamiliar legal issue and the *NT Law Handbook* remains the first port of call for giving advice in an area of law beyond their expertise.

In fact, the NT Law Handbook is a popular resource within the legal profession and in the wider community. There has been close to 300 000 hits to the online version since its launch two years ago and use continues to grow, with over 18 000 hits in July 2018.

The NT has a lot to be proud of. While it may have been one of the last jurisdictions to develop its own law handbook, it was the first to move to an online legal platform two years ago, setting the scene for other jurisdictions to follow.

Organisers of the 25th Anniversary of the *NT Law Handbook*, would like to acknowledge the leadership and foresight of AustLII in getting the handbook online. Executive Director, Associate Professor Philip Chung and Development Manager, Richard Hunter from AustLII made the trip from Sydney to celebrate this milestone with the NT legal community.

DCLS and NTLAC would like to acknowledge and thank all contributors for their generous support over the past 25 years for helping provide a vital resource for the community.

If you would like to become part of this ongoing collaborative project, please contact dorothy.fauls@legalaid.nt.gov.au.

24 July 2018 Admission Ceremony

Supreme Court of the Northern Territory



L-R: Edward Niles, Kieran Ko, Laura Payne, Lang Williamson, Anastasios Hatzilaou, Evana Coote, Iona Watson, James Linton and Sarah Morton. Missing: Harita Sridhar.