

Butterworths Australian Legal Dictionary & Butterworths Concise Australian Legal Dictionary*

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When I started studying law, the prescribed dictionary was a little paperback, written and published in England, which did a great deal to increase my awe of the subject and not very much to increase my understanding of it. Unfortunately, I found that many of the definitions in my very first legal dictionary were as mystifying as the terms they purported to define. Whilst it contained a great many Latin terms and old English legal concepts, that dictionary lacked some of the common terms that I expected to find in a legal dictionary. Not surprisingly, it also made few, if any, references to Australian law.

These shortcomings are patently not present in the new *Butterworths Australian Legal Dictionary* and the *Butterworths Concise Australian Legal Dictionary*, which were both published in January 1997. A number of features stand out for me, having used both dictionaries for many months. The first is their comprehensive nature. While the larger reference book, the *Australian Legal Dictionary*, contains approximately 25,000 entries, the concise version includes approximately 8,000 entries. All the basic information you would expect to find appears in both dictionaries - standard legal terms, the principles and doctrines from important cases, and the more common Latin phrases. Where relevant, entries include references to cases and statutes, which assists the user greatly with follow-up research. The focus is on Australian illustrations and sources, making the dictionaries particularly relevant and useful. The publisher has consulted a wide range of legal experts - both academics and practitioners - to ensure the accuracy and comprehensiveness of the entries. Some entries, however, are already

* The Honourable Dr Peter E Nygh & Peter Butt (eds), Butterworths, Sydney, 1997.

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out of date. For example, there are references to the *Industrial Relations Act 1988* (Cth) which has now been replaced by the *Workplace Relations Act 1996* (Cth). Such problems would appear inevitable, given the pace of legislative change in Australia.

The comprehensiveness of these dictionaries extends beyond the inclusion of a large number of standard legal terms and expressions. As a teacher of industrial law, I was curious to see whether the many terms peculiar to industrial relations were included. After all, it is arguable that many of these are not strictly legal terms. I was pleasantly surprised to find very useful definitions of key terms like 'enterprise bargaining', 'wage fixation' and 'comparable worth'. This broad approach extends to other areas as well. For example, both dictionaries include definitions of major Australian government agencies and programs, economic and scientific terms and concepts useful to lawyers, important international legal treaties and terms and expressions which have entered our language relatively recently, such as 'native title' and 'battered woman syndrome'. The editors have obviously taken a very broad view of what is proper for inclusion in a legal dictionary. As the Honourable Sir Anthony Mason states in the Foreword, the dictionaries can be accurately described as mini legal encyclopaedias. For their user, this means faster answers to questions and easier research, something we all welcome these days.

The definitions and explanations are written in plain English, which ought to be welcomed by all users, but will be particularly helpful to new students of law and other users who are relatively unfamiliar with legal terminology. As well as the plain English approach, the editors have provided quite detailed definitions and explanations where warranted. Both of these features make the dictionaries particularly 'user-friendly'.

An easy-to-follow user's guide is included at the front of both dictionaries. Terms are cross-referenced to related terms in both the dictionary itself and to Butterworths' *Australian Legal Words and Phrases*. Both dictionaries contain several useful appendices. As expected, there is a table of law reports, as well as a listing of popular case names with the full case title and citation. This is an indispensable tool for those of us who remember important cases like the *Franklin Dam* and the political advertising cases,

but have difficulty remembering the proper case name when it comes time to read the judgment again. The full text of the Commonwealth Constitution is also included.

These dictionaries are undoubtedly works of quality. The larger dictionary is highly recommended for legal practitioners and academics, as well as research students in law. The concise version would be excellent, in my view, for undergraduate law students, as well as commerce and business students. It would also make a useful addition to the library of business or professional people who come across legal terms in their day-to-day work and need a user-friendly legal dictionary. At only \$25 for the concise legal dictionary, Butterworths have made it easy for everyone to make the concise law dictionary a part of their research library.

