

High Court of Australia Library

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The High Court of Australia Library in Canberra is a special law collection of 140 000 volumes. The Justices' library is on two floors and a third floor holds the Bar library, for visiting barristers, and the library work area. As the library of the main appellate court in Australia the High Court Library aims 'to provide high quality and

timely reference and research services to the Justices' and 'to acquire and organise efficiently library materials in accordance with the requirement of the Court'.

The library has fourteen staff including two legally qualified research officers and two in the judgment production (proof-reading) area.

The library is not open to the public in general but provides a service to barristers during sittings. Others can use the library by appointment with the librarian. Outside users are given permission to use the Bar Library if they need to use material that is only held in the High Court.

Organisation of material

The Dynix Library System is installed on the Court's network. There is one OPAC terminal on each floor of the library. Texts are classified in the Moys law classification with LC subject headings. The

contents of edited compilations and conferences are added to the library catalogue to enhance retrieval of material held on specific legal topics. Material acquired since May 1986 has been added to the ABN database.

As with most law libraries, about seventy-five per cent of the library holdings are serials — none of which are classified. Law

reports and statutes are arranged by jurisdiction and journals are shelved alphabetically by title. The library's *Holdings list* is the key guide to the serial collection. It is published annually and shows all serial titles with a corresponding floor and stack number.

Publications

Since February 1996 the Legal Research Officers have produced the *High Court Bulletin* which is published on the Internet on the AustLII site (<http://www.austlii.edu.au/>). Other publications include the *Monthly list of acquisitions*, and the in-house titles *Legal research index*, *List of commonwealth reprints received* and library statistics. In addition the High Court Library co-ordinates the compilation of *Court library statistics* each year, which contains information on the collections in other federal courts and state supreme courts.

The collection

Over 50 000 volumes of the total collection are duplicates. For example, there are over forty sets of *Commonwealth Law Reports* held in Canberra, in Justices' Chambers in Sydney, Melbourne, Perth and Brisbane, in Registries in Sydney and Melbourne, and in all courtrooms. In addition, sets are maintained for other areas of court work such as court reporting. Copies of other main sets, such as the *Law Reports*, are held in all Chambers.

Multiple copies, of course, take up a large part of the library's budget. The library constantly reviews the need to keep multiple copies of so many expensive serials but most are heavily used. They are the daily working tools of the Court.

Law reports

The emphasis in a court library is on case law rather than legislation. As part of the common law system, which relies on precedent, there is also a need for Australian courts to keep comparative English language materials.

Consequently the library maintains a collection of law reports from the larger Commonwealth countries and from the United States of America. Since Canada, India and the United States of America are all federations, as well as Australia, not only national but some state law has to be collected. The High Court has a large collection of American reports, including the only copies in the country of some nineteenth century United States state reports.

Historical material

Research for High Court judgments may require tracking the origins of a statute or common law rule, so the library has to provide a good historical collection of texts, reports and statutes. Primary material (that is, statutes and law reports which contain the law itself) is more important than secondary material (such as journal articles). However, contemporary accounts of the law in past

centuries can also be useful to throw light on an early statute or rule. To this end the library has purchased over 10 000 microfiche in the *Nineteenth century legal treatises* series. Copies of all old editions of texts are also kept and are used regularly.

The High Court collection

With a view to the centenary of the High Court in the year 2001 the library established in 1991 a special High Court collection. This contains material by and about the Justices of the Court from 1903 to the present. The library also has an ongoing program of binding Justices' speeches.

Legal research

Work prepared by the two legal research officers since 1985 is kept for reference. The same requests sometimes recur and may only need an update added to a previous assignment. This saves time and helps to facilitate a speedy response. The legal research collection is for in-house use only.

Library services to the court

Several services which are special to a court library are provided:

Authorities: One of the priority requirements is for the library to provide authorities for court sittings. 'Authorities' are the law reports, statutes, texts and other material that are used in court hearings. The barristers are required to file their lists of authorities for appeals forty-

eight hours before the hearing. In that time the library goes through the lists crossing off any reports that are held in Chambers. These books are put on trolleys by Chambers staff and taken into Court. The remaining items on the lists are provided by the library. In gathering the authorities library staff have to quickly interpret incorrect citations, distinguish the levels of reports of matters (sometimes both the Court of Appeal and House of Lords judgments are listed for example), retrieve material from all levels of the library, and request urgent interlibrary loans.

As in everything relating to Court work, time is a critical factor. A master copy of each item is run off and then up to nine copies of each are made for the Justices and for Court Reporting staff. Every page copied is checked to see that page numbers are clear, then the items are collated and checked again before being distributed to Chambers staff. The provision of authorities is an important part of court library work and at least six staff members can be involved in their preparation. For large cases everyone is involved.

Legal research: The two legal research officers prepare papers for the Justices and their staff on points of law before the Court. The research positions are held for one to two years each and preferably require a first-class honours degree with some experience in legal practice. ■

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