

## *Behind the Scenes at CCH Australia*

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### *How CCH sources its information*

One of the questions I'm most often asked by librarians visiting CCH is "how do you get your information?"

Our Editorial Department is the focal point of an extensive information gathering network that works twenty-four hours a day. We have staff and agencies who feed us information from across the country.

Most of our "legislation watchers" (nicknamed "leg" watchers) have a background in political journalism. They have detailed knowledge of the procedures of their own parliaments and of the government departments in their state.

CCH has its own office in Parliament House, Canberra. In charge is Lee Catmull, a 'CCHer' of over twenty years. Lee was an experienced journalist before joining CCH and is one of the longest serving members of the Canberra Press Gallery.

Throughout each day, Lee collects all the source documents – statutes, regulations, gazette notices, official explanations, press releases, official copies of court and board decisions, and much more – that could be relevant, either directly or indirectly, to CCH editors. Lee's long experience with both the Canberra scene and CCH is invaluable.

CCH's Parliament House Office sends the day's documents by overnight dispatch bag to Sydney each evening. That means that our editors at North Ryde have the information on their desks the next morning. Of course, if anything of special importance happens, Lee will contact our editors and will fax information to us straight away. Major legislation is faxed to our editors in this way immediately after introduction in the Parliament.

The value of the "leg" watchers is their speed and thorough coverage of topics. We could, of course, obtain the information from the official sources (and we do this as well). However, if we relied only on official sources for our information, we wouldn't be able to offer the same speed in reporting to our subscribers.

In addition, we couldn't be sure of the depth of our coverage. CCH reporters bring together all of the relevant information on their topic areas. Having our own information gathering network is an essential ingredient. Then, our own editors add their interpretive comments on the legal and business implications of the information.

## The CCH Librarian

All of the information gathered by the "leg" watchers goes first to our librarian, Anne Lucas. With her library staff, Anne is responsible for ensuring that all the documents are quickly distributed to the relevant editors. She also has a file on each bill and follows its progress through Parliament until it receives assent.

Anne has been with CCH for two and a half years. She has a BA from the University of Sydney and a Diploma of Librarianship from the University of NSW. After completing her diploma, she worked at the University of Sydney's Fisher Library for seven years.

Before joining CCH, Anne worked in barristers' chambers and solicitors' offices in the Sydney CBD. Her CCH Area Manager had been selling her CCH publications for eight years and then one day told her that CCH had a library position vacant. Anne had been on a tour of CCH some years earlier and she remembered thinking that it would be a nice and satisfying place to work. We were very fortunate that she applied for the position.

### Making the information relevant

The mass of information we receive each day requires a great deal of specialist editorial analysis.

Our editors look at each piece of information and ask: "Is it relevant to our subscribers? How does it apply to their day-to-day work? Can this information wait until the next scheduled looseleaf report or should we mail out a Special Dispatch immediately?"

It is our aim to provide our customers with what we call "knowledge based" products. In other words, rather than just supplying the raw facts, we provide value added information that subscribers can quickly and easily apply to their own individual circumstances. For example, besides explaining the meaning of legislation, we provide its implications. Wherever possible we include time-saving features such as checklists and examples.

Sometimes people say to me that our publications are not sufficiently in-depth. The reason for this perception is that our publications lack "waffle"! Our editors are trained to write in plain English that subscribers can read and understand quickly.

We have over one hundred people working on a full time basis in our editorial department. This includes approximately thirty lawyers who are specialists in the topics on which they write. Most have had extensive experience in practice before joining CCH. In addition, our in-house editors work regularly with an extensive range of consultants and authors who are engaged in practice.

We have about sixty-five book editors in our Editorial Department. Typically, a CCH book editor may have worked as a librarian or a teacher or in publishing elsewhere before joining CCH. We have our own extensive in-house training for book editors. Book editors have direct responsibility for ensuring that the writings of our editors turn into quality publications.

A vital part of our Editorial Department is our Indexing Section. We have nine indexers who prepare the in-depth indexes, case tables and legislation finding lists that form an integral part of our publications. We know how important these locators are.

I would like to express my appreciation for this opportunity to write for the *Australian Law Librarian*.

Please remember you are welcome to visit us at any time at our CCH Head Office at North Ryde, a suburb of Sydney. We can give you a tour of the building and show you how we put our publications together. If you are interested in a tour, please contact your CCH Area Manager. And, if you would like to talk to me personally, please don't hesitate to call me at our North Ryde Office.

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