

## *Steve Porch*

Australian Taxation Office Library, Canberra

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The conclusion to the item on cleaning up documents using macros has been held over until next month.

### *Faster speeds available*

Both LINK and LEXIS are accessible at 9600 bps. As mentioned in a previous issue, the higher speeds mean less time spent online and a subsequent reduction in costs.

### *U.S. taxation materials*

One of the more interesting methods of obtaining information on current U.S. taxation developments is Tax Analysts' *Taxbase*. It is the full-text of each day's analysis of all U.S. tax-related matters, including the full texts of Government hearings and reports. It is distributed in Lotus Notes format, allowing individuals to tailor the amount and type of information they want to receive. The average file size is between 10 and 15 megabytes!

### *News from the Australian Tax Office*

Our retrospective conversion is complete. Searches on ABN now retrieve a much greater range of materials on all matters relating to taxation.

### *Electronic forms software*

Several major vendors are now producing software that allows the creation and distribution over a network, of electronic forms. Some can even link to database packages, query the database, and fill in the form with the results of the search. The potential for innovative library use of such packages is very high, and I would be interested to hear from anyone using electronic forms.

## *Scale Update*

### **David Grainger**

Director, SCALE

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### *Commonwealth legislation*

The Attorney-General announced at the end of June a project to provide all Commonwealth legislation in an up-to-date electronic form by June 1994. The legislation will be made available through SCALE, and will also be channelled to the Australian Government Publishing Service for eventual production in hardcopy. It is planned to offer two separate databases containing Commonwealth Acts and Statutory Rules respectively.

It would be fair to say that there has been constant criticism of governments for many years for failing to provide access to updated legislation. The present hardcopy reprinting and publishing programme is gradually catching up with a backlog of printing but electronic versions are the only way possible to provide constantly updated legislation in a timely fashion.

Significantly, the text for the electronic versions will be prepared by the area within the Department responsible for the official versions of reprinted Acts and Statutory Rules before it is put into the SCALE system. This will ensure both accuracy of the online version and a means of keeping the material up-to-date.

"Legislation in this up-to-date form has not previously been available in Australia", said the Attorney-General. The advantage of using SCALE is that access is readily and easily available publicly in Australia and in some overseas markets using a personal computer, a modem and communications software.

## *New Databases*

By the time of publication it is hoped that SCALE will offer access to legislation of the Northern Territory (primary and subordinate) and Tasmanian Supreme Court decisions. We aim to start building databases of New South Wales and Victorian materials (statutes and caselaw) early in 1994.

## *SCALE on other hosts*

Access to Australian legal materials for overseas searchers will be made easier with the addition to LEXIS and QL of most of the SCALE databases. LEXIS in particular plan to offer the caselaw databases (decisions of the High Court, Federal Court, Family Court, Australian Capital Territory and Northern Territory and South Australian Supreme Courts, Immigration Review and Administrative Appeals Tribunals) by late September 1993 with statutory material to follow.

SCALE is expected to be available on AARNet, the Australian and Academic Research Network, in September 1993. AARNet links into Internet, an international 'network of networks' and it is hoped that by this delivery mechanism many overseas users will be able to gain access to Australian legal materials. We are intending to make SCALE available for tertiary law school use free of charge

when the AARNet connection is in place, foregoing the revenue from law schools in the expectation that it will be regained from graduates in the workplace who will have been exposed to SCALE as students and are familiar with the advantages it offers.

## *SCALE Mk2*

In 1993-94 SCALE will be redeveloped to provide a new, user-friendly interface. This will make SCALE much more like a Macintosh or Windows application in the way it 'looks and feels'. As it is presently configured, SCALE is an easy system to use but users need to be familiar with a number of different commands to make best use of it. It is expected that the redevelopments will provide at the very least modern, graphical user interface features such as pull-down menus, push buttons, icons and dialogue boxes. It is also expected that 'SCALE Mk2' will offer searching enhancements such as the ability to rank retrieved materials in order of relevance, hypertext - to allow an electronic jump from one document to another - and a natural language enquiry facility. These changes will be both fundamental and radical and will involve changing both the hardware on which SCALE resides and the software that drives it. It is estimated that the cost for this will be more than \$700,000, and we are currently seeking approval to obtain this money from the Budget.