

National Library of Australia Response to the Review of the Law Collections and Services

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As many readers of this journal will know from previous reports, Mr Rob Brian, Parliamentary Librarian, Parliament of New South Wales, was engaged as a consultant in January this year to review the law collections and services of the National Library and to prepare a report for consideration by the Library's Council. The purpose of the Review was to evaluate the role of the National Library in the provision of services in the legal area. The Terms of Reference for the Review are listed at Appendix 1.

The report was received in February and a copy was sent to the Australian Law Librarians' Group, the High Court of Australia, the Commonwealth Attorney-General's Department, the Commonwealth Parliamentary Library, the Australian National University, and the University of Canberra. Comments on the report generally endorse Mr Brian's conclusions including his assertion that, without allocation of considerable additional resources, the organisation of the law collection is not satisfactory for effective use. The notion of the Library having a reduced role in the collecting of legal materials is accepted, with an emphasis on overseas legislation preferred. The comments received have been very valuable in terms of advancing discussion on this issue within the Library.

The Library also formed a Working Group consisting of staff from different sections of the Library to look at the implications of Rob Brian's recommendations, particularly in terms of resource requirements. The Working Group reported on 27 April 1994 and a further meeting was held with Rob Brian on 6 May 1994 to discuss progress to date.

Taking into account the comments received, the findings of the Working Group and further discussions with Rob Brian, the future role of the Library in law collections and services was considered by the National Library Council in June 1994. The following principles formed the basis for policy development in this area:

The principles applied in developing future policy for law collections and services are:

- there is a need to ensure that the size of the law collection matches the staff resources available if effective organisation and provision of service from the collection are to be achieved;
- the Library is committed to high standards of collecting, organisation and service delivery in relation to Australian, South-East Asian, East Asian and Pacific legal materials, in keeping with the collecting directions outlined in the Strategic Plan *Service to the Nation: Access to the Globe* and the Library's contribution to the Distributed National Collection;
- overseas legal materials available in electronic form will generally not be collected in hard copy;
- little used overseas legal materials will not be collected on cost-effectiveness grounds.

Taking into account the principles outlined above, the National Library Council endorsed the following policy on law collections and services.

Australian Legal Materials

The Library will continue its comprehensive collecting of Australian legal materials.

Overseas Legal Materials

The focus of collecting will be legislation and other legal materials from South-East Asia, East Asia and the Pacific. Legislation and other legal materials will not be collected from other countries for reasons of either the widespread availability

of legislation through electronic information systems or low level of demand. Looseleaf subject compilations of legislation will be collected where these are not held by other libraries. International legal materials will continue to be collected, and will be reviewed in the context of a general review of materials acquired through gift or exchange which is scheduled for late 1994.

NOTE

- For the purpose of collection development, South-East Asian countries include: Brunei, Burma, Cambodia, Indonesia, Laos, Malaysia, the Philippines, Singapore, Thailand and Vietnam.
- East Asian countries include: China, Japan, Taiwan, Hong Kong, North Korea, South Korea and Macau.
- Pacific countries include: New Zealand, Fiji, Kiribati, Nauru, Papua New Guinea, Solomon Islands, Tonga, Tuvalu, Western Samoa, Vanuatu, French Polynesia, New Caledonia, Wallis and Futuna.

Resources

Additional resources will be required for acquisition, deselection of loose issues where they have been replaced by cumulations, recataloguing and reclassifying of primary legal materials, standardisation of subject headings, rearrangement of parts of the collection, improved stack maintenance, an increased budget for binding, and an improved level of training for reference staff involved in service delivery. Progress will be made on some of these tasks using existing staff resources and a proposal will be prepared for allocation of additional resources within the 1995-96 budget process. The required outcome is a properly organised and catalogued collection with maximum potential for browsing by users.

In summary, apart from international legal materials and some looseleaf subject compilations

of legislation, the Library's overseas law collecting will comprise legislation and other legal materials from the South-East Asian, East Asian and Pacific countries referred to above. The resource requirements to collect thoroughly these materials are in excess of the resources currently allocated to the collection and organisation of overseas legal materials. However, it is considered that there is a legitimate role for the Library to collect legal materials from these areas in accordance with the collecting directions outlined in the Strategic Plan and the Library's contribution to the Distributed National Collection. Accordingly, appropriate resources will be allocated to ensure that the material is properly described and readily accessible.

The Library will also ensure that the law specialists located in the Information Services Section take wider responsibility for collecting and organising legal materials in addition to their present service delivery role. This should result in a coordinated approach in future to law collections and services. The Library is not in a position to appoint a high level law librarian for a number of reasons including the fact that, while law collections and services are an important part of the Library's overall collections and services, they are only a small part of the total, and the creation of a high level position for this purpose could not be justified.

The Library is keen to publicise widely its future role in this area and efforts will be made for Library staff to talk to law librarian groups in coming months.

For further information on this matter please contact David Toll, Director, Reader Services, telephone (06) 2621130 or e-mail dtoll@nla.gov.au, or Averill Edwards, Senior Manager, Information Services, telephone (06) 2621604 or e-mail aedwards@nla.gov.au

Appendix 1

TERMS OF REFERENCE

- 1 For the purpose of the consultancy, the Law Collection is defined as Australian and overseas materials (including Asian Collections) primarily at the Dewey Divisions 340s and 354. Formats of material include printed, microform and electronic.
- 2 In general, the Review should evaluate the role of the Library in the provision of services in the legal area. It should define the client group and make recommendations on future services.
- 3 Review the **content** of the collection to determine:
 - gaps in coverage
 - strengths and weaknesses in content
 - accuracy of the Collection Development Policy definitions of collecting levels
 - the validity of current collecting policies in the context of the Distributed National Collection
 - the potential role for the other collecting institutions in the ACT
- 4 Review the manner in which the collection is **catalogued** and **classified** to determine:
 - problems associated with the use of **Dewey**
 - the viability and desirability of other classification schemes
 - the adequacy of AACR2 for legal materials, in particular the concept of whole item versus analytical entry
- 5 Review the **access** to the collection to determine:
 - the optimum stack arrangement for physical access within the building (e.g. closed access versus open access)
 - options for access by off-site users, including an examination of current ILL practices
 - the potential for additional services based on the collection, including an assessment of the role of a law specialist
 - recommendations for additional guides to the collection
 - the potential role for other collecting institutions in the ACT
 - the inadequacy of the current range of on-line and CD-ROM services
- 6 Recommend **future directions** for:
 - the on-going use of technology (databases, CD-ROMs, AARNet, other electronic access and electronic delivery)
 - the format of material collected (print, electronic, etc)
 - the storage of legal material
 - services based on both the collection on-site and off-site collections and electronic services
- 7 Review the Library's relations with other law libraries, legal institutions and professional associations in Australia and, in particular, in the ACT and make recommendations as to appropriate future directions for such relationships