

EDITORIAL

As I write Cyclone Steve has moved from Queensland across the northern regions of Australia and is now bearing down the coast of Western Australia. Is this the dramatic result of the Queensland editorial team breathing a collective sigh of relief in seeing its last issue emerge from the printer as the Western Australian team takes a deep breath and gears up for its first issue?

Anne Gardner and I travelled to Brisbane last November for the hand over of responsibility. As we have moved deeper into the processes for producing our first issue we have developed considerable admiration and appreciation for the work of the Queensland team. Joanna, Cathy and Sue led a team who have consolidated and maintained the standard established by the ACT and South Australian teams. We will be striving to emulate their achievement.

The successful format will be retained for volume 8 although some new features will be introduced. One of these is the new column for Library Technicians in this issue and we plan to include one for Indian Ocean News in future issues. In addition, Linda McNamara is compiling indexes for volumes 6-9.

The increasing impact of electronic communication is strongly influencing our editorial decisions. Only eight years ago the *Australian Law Librarian* was a newsletter designed to notify ALLG members of current and future events, new developments in librarianship, and the movements of members. This type of information is now communicated rapidly via our national email lists. When the ACT Division upgraded the newsletter to a journal in 1993 it became the vehicle for the publication of papers on issues of topical interest, particularly the papers presented at conferences. The papers of the last two conferences however have been made immediately available by publishing them on the conference web site. The selection of items for publication in volume 8 has therefore been influenced by the recognition that the paper format has lost its usefulness as a 'news' and 'current affairs' vehicle.

There is still much conjecture and uncertainty over the long-term availability of material published electronically. Will the site continue to be supported? Will the contents of the database be migrated through future upgrades of software and operating systems? While these and other questions are still unresolved the W.A. editorial team has decided to place an emphasis on the archival value of the print medium. We are therefore seeking papers that have a long term value. We still recognise that the journal should carry papers of ALLG associated conferences but we are choosing papers that are not only of interest today but they have the potential to be a valuable source for future researchers. The State News column has been continued for this reason also – not as a notice board of current events but as a permanent record of ALLG members' activities.

All the papers in this issue, with the exception of the one by Associate Professor Macmillan, were presented at the 8th Asia-Pacific Specials Health and Law Conference in Hobart in August 1999. The paper by **Dr Stefan Petrow** documents the increasing interest in Australian legal history and the recognition that Australian law has a unique heritage. In his conclusion he makes several suggestions how law librarians can play a major role by not only preserving the historical materials and preparing legislative histories, but also by recognising the value of legal history to judicial decisions.

Lawyers and potential lawyers are not the only ones who require legal information. Members of the general community need it for a variety of reasons. **Elizabeth McKibbin** and **Sue Scott** share with us the benefits of their experience at the Legal Information Access Centre in NSW by describing the kinds of questions asked and the resources used to provide the answers. They have prepared a model 'pathway' that enables a lay person to progress to an appropriate level of understanding and use of legal information and to maximise the benefits of legal advice when needed.

Sue Rigney's paper describes the impact of economic rationalism on Australian law libraries in the government sector during the 1990s. It is a valuable record or 'snapshot' of a turbulent period in which librarians are re-inventing their skills and their services.

Catherine Crawford raises many issues in just one aspect of the current debate surrounding copyright reform – that of copyright issues pertaining to electronic databases. Catherine's paper complements that of **Associate Professor Fiona Macmillan**. Professor Macmillan gives a very detailed analysis of the possible consequences that the *Copyright Amendment (Digital Agenda) Bill* and the report of the Copyright Law Review Committee may have on the practice of 'fair dealing' and copying by libraries and archives.

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