

to twelve include consideration of mediation for solving disputes rather than courts. They also include tips for going forward into the future with a positive frame of mind rather than with backward-looking regrets (p.129). By reference to cases, he also cautions about the dangers of marrying on the rebound (p.131).

However, there are some difficulties for Australian readers with this publication because it presumes that lawyers will be necessary to the divorce process. This does not take into account the high rate of DIY divorce in Australia which is facilitated by the family court and the provision of free classes by Legal Aid Commissions. Bieber also advises people never to have an inexperienced or incompetent lawyer to represent them (p.75) but I am not sure how ordinary people would know how skilled a lawyer might or might not be until after the event. Consulting a lawyer for advice on divorce may be the first and only time in people's lives that they do so, and without an existing knowledge of the process it is hard to see how they would know whether or not their lawyer is competent. Even if there are feelings of dissatisfaction in initial interviews, obtaining a second opinion is likely to be daunting, expensive and possibly confusing.

This brings me to another minor criticism of Bieber's work. I am not sure that people who eventually divorce

are necessarily thinking of that when they separate. It would thus be difficult to give this book to a friend who would find it very useful for coping with separation but not yet be ready to face the finality of their relationship. There is a gap, I think, between the decision to separate (not always mutual) and the institution of divorce proceedings — at least one year according to law — but this book tends to treat them as inevitably and closely linked despite the late chapter on mediation. Many of the decisions about property and children are necessarily made by the couple at the time of separation and this could be usefully distinguished in the structure of the book.

Nevertheless, this is a very timely and useful guide to the terrors and pitfalls of divorce for the increasing numbers of people who decide that permanent separation is the 'only way' to end their relationship. It is respectful of the marriage bond, compassionate and sensitive to the pain caused by divorce. It is also a legal handbook for managing the process and, as such, a distinct improvement on other 'how to' manuals. Unlike other legal books on divorce, it never forgets that divorcing couples are whole human beings not just parties to the conflict.

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must not be ignored by those commenting and educating about the law.

This is certainly not a 'how to defend your legal rights as a consumer' book, but it would be a helpful resource for people who are able to read about the law. It is logical and accessible in its structure and provides a readable and reasonably in-depth discussion of the relevant statutes and cases. After considering the quirks of consumer protection law in a federal system in chapter two, the following chapters examine contractual remedies against sellers and suppliers, and manufacturers' liability standards for goods and services. The next group of chapters examines occupational and professional licensing and laws relating to deceptive consumer practices. Consumer credit and remedies make up the last two chapters and they include a summary of recent federal and State procedural reforms such as class actions.

The chapters also keep the reader interested. For example, comparative material from England and the USA is used to illustrate alternative legal solutions. Many chapters also include helpful tables comparing similar statutes. In addition, relevant Australian and international research is considered at a number of points. Finally, many chapters provide a historical context outlining the origins of the law in that area.

Despite these many strengths I was also surprised by some things. First the index at five pages is really too brief for a book of over 400 pages. This sounds picky, but one of the consequences is that things are hard to find. For example, after reading the discussion of small claims/consumer claims tribunals and courts I tried to refine it using the index. Unfortunately the term 'small claims courts' is not listed although in fairness 'consumer claims tribunal' is listed, and includes reference to small claims. But why isn't the term 'small claims courts' listed separately and cross-referenced? In general large, detailed indexes containing plenty of cross-references are a must for large books such as this.

I also identified an error of fact. While Goldring *et al* discuss small claims in South Australia they failed to notice the legislative change in 1991. Minor claims, as they are referred to, are now dealt with in the Magistrate's Court not the District Court, under the Magistrate's Court Act 1991. That Act also lifted the financial limit from \$2000 to \$5000. I must admit this made me wonder if the book had been rushed

Consumer Protection Law

by J. Goldring, L. Maher, J. McKeough, G. Pearson; The Federation Press 1998; 5th edn; 436 pp; \$60 softcover.

Books about particular areas of law often share a fatal flaw with manuals for computer software. As any novice computer user has discovered, the authors of these manuals invariably fail to distinguish between all that could be known about a piece of software and what is actually important for the average user to know in order to be able to use it. Law books also run the risk of degenerating into discussions of technical legal questions from long forgotten cases or obscure sections of legislation. And while these discussions may have important consequences for the future of civilisation it is often very difficult to know because frankly the authors have lost sight of the wood for the trees. One way to think about the latest edition of *Consumer Protection Law* is to ask: does it read like a computer manual? I answer that question below but first I

summarise what is covered in the book and consider a number of minor issues.

Consumer Protection Law is undoubtedly a comprehensive discussion of the law and policy relating to consumer protection law in Australia. While it examines federal and State legislation in detail it does more than this. At the outset there is a useful introductory discussion that provides a context for what follows. Here the authors consider issues including the purpose and relatively short history of Australian consumer protection law. More importantly they vigorously defend the role of state regulation in consumer protection arguing: '[w]e do not accept that, as a general rule, self-regulation as the only or principle form of consumer protection, is effective or desirable'. Law books often ignore these important value questions and yet they cannot and

and if as a result other changes had escaped the authors' attention.

Overall *Consumer Protection Law* is a detailed and comprehensive book but not tediously so. I will in the future undoubtedly use it as a reference book and if I was teaching a topic to undergraduate students I would certainly use it as a text book. However, I would also want to supplement it with other more evaluative materials because while it argues at the outset that self-regulation is not effective, it then proceeds to

avoid evaluation of consumer protection law in Australia. In this way the authors display a surprising reluctance to consider the important questions about whether Australian law in this area is satisfactory, and about the ways it could be improved. In sum, more attention could have been paid to pondering the wood not just the trees. Law books should examine how our society can be better served by law.

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In the Same Boat: The Self Help Kit

The Collective of Self Help Groups; 3rd edn, 1998; 56 pp, \$8 plus \$2 postage.

This publication is designed as a resource for groups involved in self help and/or social change. It aims to provide basic information for groups to help them get started, keep going and even wind up if necessary. The different possible group structures are explained along with the various functions such groups can provide for their members and for the general public.

There is plenty of practical advice on how to set up a group and look after the day-to-day tasks such as: conducting meetings; obtaining and keeping track of the finances; and resolving conflict. Interaction between the group and outside world is covered with sections on handling enquiries, using the media, producing news sheets, liaising with professionals and using the internet.

For those groups eager to take their message out into the world, there is a section which covers strategies on how to run campaigns, demonstrations, petitions, boycotts and occupations. *In the Same Boat* also includes lists of relevant resources, publications and organisations' contacts.

On the whole, *In the Same Boat* provides lots of basic knowledge on how to run a self help or social action group as well as supplying leads for those requiring further information and some fun cartoons by Judy Horacek.

To obtain copies contact: COSHG, PO Box 251 Brunswick East, 3057 or tel 03 9349 2301, Wednesdays 2-4 p.m.

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