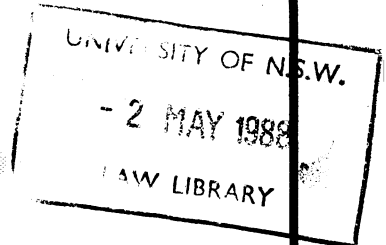


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**18 Freedom of Information**

Review



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**Comment**

The Senate Standing Committee on Legal and Constitutional Affairs has finally released its report on the operation and administration of the freedom of information legislation. The 340 page report, which contains no less than 126 recommendations, is a pragmatic response to the competing views of the economic rationalists, who would emasculate the Act in the name of continuing fiscal restraint, and Fol supporters who argue for the extension of access rights.

Thankfully, the committee, with one exception, remains committed to the concept of freedom of information. Whether the Federal Government has the political will to implement the committee's recommendations remains to be seen. Its track record does not engender much confidence even to the most optimistic Fol supporter.

Some of the committee's more significant recommendations include the reduction of the present \$30 application fee to \$15, introduction of a \$540 ceiling on non-personal affairs requests and a reduction in filing fees for AAT applications with provision for the Registrar of the Tribunal to waive such fees in certain cases. While we consider that the level of charges proposed by the Committee will still serve to deter a significant number of persons from using the Act, it is nevertheless, a step in the right direction. The committee's recommendation that requests for personnel documents should be treated as a cost of personnel management and not of Fol is another important measure which stems from some of the present criticism of the costs associated with Fol. Other significant recommendations include the widening of reverse-Fol procedures and a widening of the AAT's power so as to allow it to award costs against any party.

Because of the importance of this report to the future development of Fol legislation in Australia, we have published the recommendations of the Committee in place of a feature article. We wish to express our thanks to the committee for kindly permitting us to reproduce its recommendations.

**Moira Paterson  
Paul Villanti**