

AUSTLII MEDIA RELEASE



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Australasian Legal Information Institute

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The Australasian Legal History Libraries – Australia's legal history now freely available online at AustLII

The Chief Justice of Australia, the Honourable Robert French AC, was the Guest of Honour at a function held in Sydney yesterday evening, celebrating the completion of a major research project to make available online complete collections of many of the key resources of Australasia's legal history.

The project known as "The Australasian Legal History Libraries" was the result of collaborative research undertaken by AustLII (The Australasian Legal Information Institute), a joint research facility of UNSW Australia (The University of New South Wales) and the University of Technology, Sydney, together with ten other universities and 21 Chief Investigators including many of Australia's most prominent legal historians. It was partly funded by an Australian Research Council (ARC) Linkage, Infrastructure, Equipment and Facilities (LIEF) grant.

The Australasian Legal History Libraries, comprising the Colonial Legal History Library (1788-1900) and the Federation Law Library (1901-1950), provide near-comprehensive annual Acts from the commencement of each Australian jurisdiction (Commonwealth, States, and Territories) and New Zealand. For most jurisdictions this is now complete. The Libraries also contains substantial colonial collections of reported cases, and case law databases 'recovered' from newspaper reports before formal law reporting commenced in particular jurisdictions. They include the authorised series of reports from all States (except Queensland) to 1950, and in some cases beyond this. There are nearly 30,000 decisions and approximately 42,000 Acts. The complete Victorian Gazette (1851-1999) and precursors, with 33,000 items, adds breadth to the Library content. By using AustLII's automated citator LawCite, it is possible to find how cases since 1788 have been cited by courts in Australia and internationally since that time, and how they are still being used in current legal decisions.

The Australasian Legal History Libraries will be of benefit to many classes of users: the research of specialist legal historians; researchers in all aspects of the humanities because of the extent to which law and legal institutions permeate their work; family and local history researchers; and all practising lawyers, judicial officers and students, because of the continuing relevance of historical case law and legislation to current legal problems.

AustLII is Australia's largest and most popular online legal research facility. AustLII's 570 legal databases include current and historical case law, legislation, law reform reports, law journals and the largest national treaties collection on the Internet. AustLII receives over 600,000 accesses per day, and is regularly rated by HitWise as Australia's most used legal website. Since its inception AustLII has provided free access for the Australian public to the essential legal information needed for the rule of law and democracy to function effectively. AustLII's broad public policy agenda is to improve access to justice through better access to information.

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