

Freedom of Information

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Review

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Contents

Articles

The Ballad of Frank and Candour:
Trying to Shake the Secrecy Blues
from the Heart of Government
by Rick Snell 34

Western Australia: A Brief Look at the
First 18 Months
by Helen Sheridan 38

Victorian AAT decisions 43
Lancaster 43, Gibbs 44,
AMR 44, Billinghamurst 45, Drane 45,
Tilley 46, David Syme & Co 46

Federal AAT decisions 47
Keane 47, Birch 48, Connolly 49,
Wilson 50, Cyclists' Rights Action
Group 51

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**Correspondence to Legal Service
Bulletin Co-op., C/- Faculty of Law,
Mash University, Clayton 3168
T I. (03) 9544 0974**

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Comment

The wonders of Internet have given the *Fol Review* the opportunity to expand its coverage and service. A World Wide Web site has been constructed for the Review. For those with access to the internet the location is at

<http://www.its.newnham.utas.edu.au:80/dept/comlaw/law/foi>

The site is still in the early stages of development but it should improve in quantity and quality on a weekly basis. The site will not only be a vehicle for the *Review* but will also provide background information about FoI in Australia (contact addresses, basic information about FoI in each jurisdiction, details of research being undertaken etc). The site will also be linked to open government projects in the US, Canada, UK and elsewhere.

The Australian Law Reform Commission and Administrative Review Council Discussion Paper on 'Changes to Commonwealth Freedom of Information Legislation' was released as this issue was heading to the printers. For a copy of the paper contact the ALRC at 133 Castlereagh St, Sydney 2000 (or ph 02 284 6333 or fax 02 284 6363). A copy of the paper is also available on disc. The closing date for submissions is Friday 14 July 1995. The world wide web site will have a summary of the paper by the third week of June and my impressions on its suggestions. I will put a continuing update, on the web, of my 'submission in progress' to generate critical feedback and suggestions from those who have internet access.

From a quick glance at the first few chapters, the paper looks promising but at the same time raises a few puzzling issues. The review received 120 submissions and the discussion paper is 133 pages. This is a lot of material to cover in a short period before the deadline. The review is clearly in favour of strengthening the Act and has been persuaded that current provisions and practices in many areas need to be revamped. One of its most intriguing and possibly controversial proposals will be its support for the creation of a new mechanism, the independent monitor. From my quick read there appears to be no discussion about the merits of adopting the Information Commissioner model. On the other hand, the Independent Monitor is given a whole swag of diverse functions and duties including training, promotion, monitoring statistics and performance, advice to government on a whole array of informational issues and almost everything short of a direct review of cases.

Another major recommendation of the review is that Government Business Enterprises (GBEs) should be subject to the *Fol Act*. The recommendation is based on the solid foundation that the continuing connection between GBEs and governments demands some degree of accountability.

I would encourage all readers of the *Fol Review* to get hold of a copy of the Discussion Paper and make a response. There are too many important issues and principles up for grabs for this discussion paper to solidify quietly into a final report to the Minister.

Rick Snell

tel (002) 20 2062 fax (002) 20 7623

e-mail: R.Snell@law.utas.edu.au