

Freedom of Information

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Comment

This issue spans the spectrum of discussion about Fol. We lead off with a retrospective from John Cain looking at a number of issues arising out of the introduction of Fol to Victoria. His article is a rare reflection from one of the main actors in Fol developments during the 1980s. The author offers a strong defence of the Cabinet and internal working document exemptions, concluding that the conflict between the competing interests supporting disclosure and those supporting non-disclosure has yet yet to find a satisfactory middle ground.

The second article, by Maeve McDonagh, takes us on a journey of Fol developments in Europe. Ireland and Great Britain have started to melt the ice blocks of government secrecy. Meanwhile the European Union is starting to accept greater transparency in its decision-making processes. The author argues that the movement of the EU towards a policy of greater openness may provide an impetus for Ireland and Great Britain to embrace open government with a greater degree of commitment.

The third article is a response by Bruce Smith to the letter from the NSW Deputy Ombudsman published in *Fol Review* 56. The author has waged a continuous campaign to have Fol in NSW subjected to a greater degree of scrutiny.

The three articles taken together represent a fascinating picture of access laws. On the one hand we have a former politician fairly satisfied in having led the way in introducing Fol to a relatively hostile State Westminster system. The second author is optimistic that a greater degree of access is on the horizon in Europe. The third author captures the mood of many of us who are battling a feeling of lassitude as we continue to demand a satisfactory level of scrutiny of agency handling of Fol. I cannot imagine how Bruce Smith would cope with the position in Tasmania. Bruce complains that ten NSW agencies use six different tables to outline processing times for requests. Here in Sleepy Hollow any Table would be manna from heaven. At the moment most Tasmanian agencies declare in their annual reports 'we received x requests and finalised y requests. See the 1993-94 Annual Report for Department of Premier and Cabinet (DPAC) for more details.' Thirteen months after the end of the reporting period, the DPAC report, with its wonderful array of statistical information, is yet to see the light of day.

On a lighter note, the Freedom of Information World Wide Web site has received a very favourable reaction. I would love to hear your comments or ideas about the site which is located at:

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

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