

BOOK LAUNCH



"THE LAW HANDBOOK" (Revised Edition)

Redfern Legal Centre

"The provision of legal advice to the poor remains a major problem'

SUMMARY OF SPEECH BY JUSTICE KIRBY

EMBARGO: TUESDAY, 27 MAY, 1986 1.00 P.M.

SUBJECT: LAW "MADE EASY" BOOK LAUNCHED BY JUDGE
LEGAL ADVICE TO POOR "A GROWING PROBLEM", SAYS KIRBY

SYDNEY, TUESDAY,

The former Chairman of the Australian Law Reform Commission, Justice Michael Kirby, today said that insufficient was done to inform citizens of their legal rights and duties. He also said that the diminishing number of sole practitioner GPs in the legal profession presented problems in getting expert advice to poor and disadvantaged groups in the community. He said that the drift of lawyers to large city firms, into the public service and big companies meant fewer lawyers available to average citizens, with legal problems. He said that ironically this "drift" was occurring at the precise time when average citizens were becoming more aware of legal rights and more determined to enforce them.

Justice Kirby was speaking at the "launch" of the new edition of The Law Handbook published by the Redfern Legal Centre. The launch took place at the Redfern Town Hall. The Centre operates in conjunction with community legal centres throughout the State. In addition to "The Law Handbook" it publishes "street wise" comics for young people on legal, public health and other themes. The Law Handbook is written by barristers, solicitors and other legal experts on topics of common concern to ordinary citizens. Because of rapid changes in the law, the second edition has been published to bring the Handbook up to date. Amongst topics covered in the Handbook are:

- * renting and buying a house.

- * family law disputes.
- * taxation problems.
- * consumer complaints.
- * debts and bankruptcy.
- * immigration laws and procedures.
- * making a will.
- * disputes with neighbours and many more.

KEEPING UP WITH LAW

Justice Kirby said that he was pleased to be associated with the "launch" of such a "practical book":

"I am pleased for three reasons. First, the whole idea of the book is to present the law in a way that is accessible to ordinary citizens. There is a dangerous hypocrisy in deeming everybody to know the law but doing precious little to ensure that citizens have a ready means of access to the basic rule by which they are governed. This book has been written by experts in the law. It is expressed simply, well laid out with a good index and practical suggestions for follow up and access to helping agencies. So it definitely fills a notable gap. Secondly, it is up to date and fully revised. I checked it on a number of points that have recently come before the Court of Appeal and found it to be up to date with legal authority. The first edition was an outstanding success. It sold over 20,000 copies in each print run. At \$25.00 a copy it was a bargain for individuals and community groups. As well, the present edition contains a voucher to provide each subscriber with an "up date" in 1987 free of charge. Perhaps every legal author should be required to offer such a free

service. Thirdly, the book fills a vacuum left by the drift of lawyers into the big city firms and away from suburban practice. The suburban solicitor used to be the first point of contact of most ordinary people with legal problems. The decline of the economic viability of sole practitioners and the rise of multi member law firms in city office blocks is not confined to Australia. It is a world wide phenomenon. It doubtless means more efficiency and better service for the wealthy and the corporations who can afford such lawyers. But who is to serve the ordinary people with problems in the suburbs? This is a great challenge before the legal profession. Pending a solution, The Law Handbook and the legal centres that have sprung up throughout the State provide partial solutions", Justice Kirby said

NOTE ON BOOK

For further information about The Law Handbook contact Caroline Leees, Redfern Legal Centre, 698 7277. The second edition of The Law Handbook sells at \$26.95 post free. It can be purchased from the Redfern Legal Centre, 73 Pitt Street, Redfern. After the end of May, the Handbook will sell at \$29.95 retail price. It was compiled with contributions from leading Sydney barristers, solicitors and legal academics, including a number of QCs. The first legal resources book was published in 1978. It proved such a success that there were numerous reprints. There are similar legal resources books published in four States of Australia. The first edition of The Law Handbook was published in 1979 and brought up to date in a number of reprints. Support in the funding of the book is provided by the Law Foundation of N.S.W.