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AUSTRALIAN LAW JOURNAL

LEGAL ENCYCLOPAEDIA CELEBRATES 21ST
BIRTHDAY

Michael Kirby

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In September 2014, in Sydney and Melbourne, events were held to celebrate the 21st year of the publication of *The Laws of Australia* (TLA) by Thomson Reuters (the publisher of this Journal). The celebration took place in Sydney on 4 September and in Melbourne on 16 September, 2014.

The Melbourne celebration was attended by Mr John Riordan, of the Melbourne Bar: originator of the concept of a new encyclopaedia of Australian law. Mr Riordan was the founding Editor-in-Chief of TLA. Thirty years ago, he gathered together a collection of able legal practitioners, mostly from the Melbourne Bar. He established a distinguished advisory board that included Sir Zelman Cowen, later Governor-General of Australia. The basic concept of the taxonomy initiated by this team was retained when Thomson Reuters (then LawBook Co.) took over the publication in 1993. Mr Riordan brought to the Melbourne celebration on 16 August 2014 a bottle of fine claret which had been laid down at the time of the foundation of the TLA project. With an appropriate flourish, the bottle was opened and consumed at the Melbourne event. The current generation of Melbourne-based title editors and authors (together with the staff of the publisher) pronounced it to be a fine vintage that had improved with age. The objective of the current Editor-in-Chief of TLA (Hon. Michael Kirby, past Justice of the High Court) was said to be to ensure that the same could true of the present service.

In his remarks both in Sydney and Melbourne, Michael Kirby paid tribute to those who had originated the idea of an Australian encyclopaedia of law. He congratulated the current editors, authors and staff members. In particular, he noted the shift of subscriptions from loose leaf hard copy format so that today a majority of subscribers receive the online edition only. With the shift to online publication, Mr Kirby emphasised his commitment to improved up-to-datedness. Computerised delivery of legal data raises expectations of currency as well as accuracy. A significant feature of TLA of recent times has been the large improvement of the publication from this point of view.

Two other features of the new technology were identified. These included the capacity to search the service by the use of *Proview*: a search facility now increasingly available for the TLA service. This allows users to annotate publications with their own comments; highlight particular passages; transmit passages to colleagues for use; and find relevant material under other titles that bear upon statutes, cases and analysis for the purpose of research and professional use.

Another feature is the ready capacity of current publishing technology to produce “drop-out” books from the TLA service on particular subject matters, where it is judged that a market for those books exists in the legal profession. In 2013, a number of such books were published including *Interpretation and Use of Legal Services* by Perry Herzfeld, Thomas Prince and Dr Stephen Tully; *Investigating Crime* by Professor Mirko Bagaric, Danielle Andrewartha, Ian Harvey SC and Yvette Harvey; *Copyright* by Peter Knight; and *Documentary Evidence* (2nd Edition) by Dr Roger Brown.

In 2014 further “drop-out” books based on TLA titles have been published and are being proving popular. One of these, *Judicial Review* edited by Mark Robinson SC of the Sydney Bar, was launched in Sydney on 11 August 2014 by Sir Anthony Mason. Further recent “drop-out” books include *Competition Law* by Daniel Clough; *Insurance* (2nd Edition) by Joseph Veneziano and *Restitution* by Jason Taliadoros and Sharon Erbacher. This technology permits second and later editions of these books to be produced from future updates of the relevant titles. Even those who do not subscribe to the full TLA service can thereby take advantage of the service in the areas of their legal specialty.

The rapid shift in Australian law to Australian source materials and the development of new technology come together in TLA, evidencing the remarkable changes that are happening in legal publication generally for the Australian legal market. This *Journal*, as another flagship of Thomson Reuters, offers congratulations to TLA on its dual anniversaries.