

The BIALL Sustainability Working Group

Abstract: The BIALL Sustainability Working Group is now up and running, having received formal approval from the BIALL Council. Here **Christine Baird**, Information Services Officer at Pinsent Masons LLP and a member of the new group, explains how it aims to ensure that sustainability is at the heart of BIALL’s agenda, both now and going into the future.

Keywords: BIALL; sustainability; legal information providers; hard copy services

The BIALL Sustainability Working Group has been established as a response to the climate crisis. It’s clear we’re at a watershed moment. The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) believes that if we want to limit global warming to a liveable 1.5degC then radical action is needed across all sectors immediately.¹ With this knowledge in mind, I started to become increasingly aware of little sustainability challenges in my day-to-day working life – unnecessary plastic packaging on journals and books, stationery and other material that was difficult or impossible to recycle, and the enormous complexity of evaluating the carbon footprint of different resources. Viewed separately each of these is a small issue, but taken together and multiplied by each of our offices, and then by the whole sector, the impact is huge! The Sustainability Working Group was created as a response to this challenge – to empower legal information professionals to take action in their field.

OUR IMPACT ON THE ENVIRONMENT

Our aim is to raise awareness of environmental impacts related to legal information provision, and to identify and act on opportunities to establish more sustainable working practices. A key way in which we aim to achieve this is by facilitating knowledge sharing. We hope to publicise some of the great work that so many of us are already doing in this area, and to share ideas and initiatives that have worked (and some that haven’t).

We also aim to provide a space for collaboration, pulling together and sharing existing knowledge across the sector and encompassing input from legal information professionals, lawyers, in-house sustainability professionals, suppliers, publishers, and members of the wider library community.



Figure 1: It’s no secret that the planet is in deep trouble and Deadvlei, near Sossusvlei Pan in Namibia, offers a glimpse of the future if no action is taken. But what can organisations like BIALL do to help? The Sustainability Working Group has been set up to address this very question.



Figure 2: The Working Group will encourage firms and other organisations to share information and procedures relating to their sustainability drive, such as how their recycling is organised.

The key initiatives of the group are:

- To work with publishers and suppliers to reduce the amount of soft plastic waste associated with hardcopy procurement, and to establish the carbon footprint of hardcopy and digital resources.
- To support legal libraries in reducing emissions and waste associated with the day-to-day running of services and to facilitate recycling and sustainable disposal practices for material such as books and loose-leaf binders.
- To identify and put in place measures to decrease the carbon footprint and waste associated with the running of BIALL itself – looking at ways to reduce the impact of its events, training, and online resources.
- To produce a library of guidelines, tools, case studies and other practical resources supporting sustainable working practices for information services professionals and the organisations they work for.

REPRESENTATIVE APPROACH

The Working Group is comprised of members from all jurisdictions covered by BIALL and reflects the interests of both academic and legal practice librarians. The members are: Beki Herbert, Information Services Manager, Michelmores LLP; Kirsty Edginton, Information Assistant, Linklaters LLP; John Miller, Subject Librarian for the School of Humanities and Law, Liverpool Hope

University; Helen Dods, Senior Assistant Librarian, House of Lords; Ruth McMahon, Information Services Manager, Arthur Cox; Christine Baird, Information Services Officer, Pinsent Masons.

Our goal is for the group to be as inclusive as possible, with opportunities for everyone to get involved.

The basis of our terms of reference came from an open-to-all planning session earlier this year where we asked BIALL members what sustainability issues they would like to see addressed. This, and the feedback we received on the draft proposal in our second planning meeting in September, has been invaluable to helping us ensure that the group's aims are as representative as possible of the concerns and interests of the BIALL community.

In the next few months we will be sending out a survey which will help us to get a more comprehensive picture of sustainability projects and issues that are important to you, and we hope that the information from this will inform a lot of our early decision making, so please do take a moment to fill this in when it arrives.

We will also be holding regular meetings to provide updates on the group's activities and to listen to any ideas and feedback you might have, which will be publicised on the Jiscmail email lists. There will also be opportunities in the future to join the group, so keep an eye out for these if you are interested.

If you have any questions or would like more information on the Sustainability Working Group, please contact sustainability@BIALL.org.uk

Footnote

¹ IPCC, 'In-depth Q&A: The IPCC's sixth assessment on how to tackle climate change' (Carbon Brief, 4 April 2022) <www.carbonbrief.org/in-depth-qa-the-ipccs-sixth-assessment-on-how-to-tackle-climate-change/> accessed 10 March 2023.