

CONFERENCE REPORT

ALLA Conference 2013: “Law Librarians are a National Icon and a National Resource”

Abstract: In this conference report Vola Walker gives an account of the conference of the Australian Law Librarians Association (ALLA) held in Sydney in 2013.

Keywords: conference; law librarianship; Australia

“Law librarians are a national icon and a national resource”. This inspiring statement was made by Justice Margaret Beazley, President of the NSW Court of Appeal at the ALLA conference in Sydney in September 2013.

Thanks to the generous support of the BIALL international conference bursary I attended the “Agitations – Empowering, Inspiring and Audacious” conference organised by the Australian Law Librarians Association (ALLA) Conference. The conference lived up to its name and I’ve summarised some of the highlights below.

To get everyone in the conference mood, there was the opportunity to tour the libraries of Herbert Smith Freehills and Clayton Utz or the State Library of New South Wales. I opted for the law firm libraries and thanks goes to Helen Cluff (HSF) and Karen Wu (CU) for making the tour group feel so welcome and also to Janelle Moser for ensuring we all made it to both offices and back to the Town Hall in time for the social media panel.

Both HSF and CU are located in modern buildings with newly designed libraries including lots of public space and a cafe in each. They both occupy high floors and have amazing views with lots of natural light. The tour was a great way to meet some of the other delegates whilst walking through the central business district of Sydney.

The conference marked the start of the new national association, ALLA, the Australian Law Librarians’ Association formed from the amalgamated state associations. Like BIALL, the new president takes her seat at the conference and so Lisa Sylvester, the outgoing president handed over the reins to Kirsty McPhee, the ALLA President for 2013/2014.

The conference began with a giving of thanks to the Cadigal people, the first people to inhabit the land where the conference venue, Sydney Town Hall stood. A charity raffle in support of the Indigenous Literacy Foundation’s Reading Opens Doors programme was also held during the event.

The conference got off to a cracking start with a lively discussion from the panel and the audience about Social Media and the Law. The panel was an interesting cross section of a judge, a couple of barristers and an author.

Namely, Judge Judith Gibson, New South Wales District Court, Kate Eastman SC, a human rights barrister, Geoffry Holland, lecturer and barrister and Weenee Yap of survive-law.com. Holland and Yap have recently published ‘Social Media Law and Marketing: Fans, Followers and Online Infamy’. David Sinfield from the University of Western Sydney proved an excellent chairman for this lively discussion which included questions and tweets from the audience. Of particular note, was the fact that Judge Gibson in contrast to many of the Australian judiciary expressed her support for the use of social media in the law.

The conference was a mix of presentations from librarians, judges, barristers and lawyers speaking on subjects that affect us in our day to day working life and topics of wider interest such as human rights in Australia and the rights of asylum seekers.

Professor Gillian Triggs, the President of the Australian Human Rights Commission and Acting Race Discrimination Commissioner gave the keynote speech on the first day of the conference. A former international commercial lawyer and a former Director of the British Institute of International and Comparative Law, she explained that she had great respect for law librarians as she had spent much of her career dealing with international legal material. She gave an interesting and measured speech about the developments in human rights, the rights of asylum seekers and freedom of speech in Australia over the last year.

Jean O’Grady, Director of Research Services & Libraries of DLA Piper gave a presentation entitled “Legal publishing: where to now?”. Many of you will have read her blog “Dewey B Strategic” which was rated in the 2012 ABA Journal Blawg 100. <http://www.abajournal.com/blawg100>

O’Grady began by giving an overview of how the role of libraries in law firms has developed from the early 80’s to the present day. She emphasised that as law firms begin to attempt to manage big data there will be many opportunities for law librarians and she encouraged the concept of embedded librarians to ensure that librarians remain closely aligned to the needs of the business.

O'Grady suggested that we should model our libraries on the ever-popular Apple stores: a place for users to go when they need help, when they wish to work on their own and also when they wish to participate in collaborative learning.

O'Grady explained the importance of viewing the library from the standpoint of the Managing Partner and the need to ask ourselves what is core to the business of the law firm? O'Grady said when considering how to rebrand and improve productivity in a library, it is important to consider what services you should stop offering. Her 3 step programme for realigning libraries to the core functions of a law firm consisted of 1) vendor sourcing, 2) internal centralisation and 3) preparing for the move from print to digital. With the last point, she commented that looseleafing simply wouldn't exist in the 21st century if the publishers were paying for the time to took to maintain looseleaves. Her advice was to reduce print distribution and to negotiate unlimited national licences wherever possible. She also recommended using usage monitoring tools for all resources.

The keynote speaker on the second day of the conference was Justice Margaret Beazley, President of the NSW Court of Appeal. She got the audience on her side from the start, by telling us that law librarians are a national icon and a national resource! She spoke about the impact of law on society and gave an overview of recent Australian cases and explained how court interpretation of statutes has evolved. Key cases covered included the *Mabo* case, *Mabo v Queensland [No 2]* (1992) 175 CLR which lead to the legal recognition of native title (land rights) into Australian law. Over 400 international cases and articles were cited and law librarians were very much involved in the necessary research. Other cases discussed were *Norrie v NSW Registrar of Births, Deaths and Marriages*, [2013] NSWCA 145 which deals the definition of sex and *Monis v The Queen*, [2013] HCA 4 which dealt with freedom of speech and offensive communications.

David Shumaker's presentation on "Audacious Goals for Embedded Librarians" was an interesting summary of his research on embedded librarians. This is the model for "placing information professionals into partnerships with the individuals and working groups that depend upon their knowledge and expertise" He has studied various organisations and special libraries including law. His key point was that embedded librarians are in a better position to seize opportunities because they are at the heart of a department or sector group. He covered the way the industry has changed since the advent of the internet and said the librarians were now required to fill new roles and really show that they were aligned with the strategic initiatives and aims of the organisation. He made his point by including the quote from Clay Shirky "You're gonna miss us when we're gone! Has never been much of a business model".

Under the embedded model, Shumaker believes that librarians are able to focus more on relationships instead of individual transactions, are able to specialise more and

so instead of having a wide range of generic knowledge they can align to a specific practice group. Embedded librarians are seen to be more engaged in a firm and part of the team, as they sit amidst the practice group, instead of making people come to visit them and they are seen to be part of the team instead of just a service provider. Finally, he argued that embedded librarians gain more recognition as their work is highly visible and immediate and so often more recognised and appreciated.

David's presentation was followed by a short update from Philip Mullen, from K&L Gates who spoke about his practical experience of introducing embedded librarians in their Sydney office. The project was driven by an office move and when the company moved to a new building the three librarians moved to three separate floors. Overall they consider the project to have been successful.

Just to make me feel at home, there was a presentation by Fiona Brown on Law Firm Library Outsourcing: The UK Experience. This is a topic of great interest in Australia as outsourcing has only just hit the shores of the library world in Australia, although the outsourcers aren't currently providing law library and legal research services. Brown summarised her findings based on a literature review, comments published on social media and interviews she carried out with six of the firms who had outsourced their library services. Her thesis is available online at <http://arrow.monash.edu.au/hdl/1959.1/901420>

Malcolm Stephens of Allens Linklaters spoke about "The Indefinite Detention of Refugees" and talked the audience through the legislation that made this possible. This was timely as it took place in the same week as Tony Abbott (Liberal-National coalition) was sworn in as the new Australian prime minister. One of his campaign policies was to 'stop the boats' to reduce the flow of asylum seekers arriving in Australia via Indonesia.

Justice Geoff Lindsay, NSW Supreme Court spoke about "The Future of Law Reporting in Australia". He had previously spoken at an ALLA lunchtime session and he developed the points raised there. He debated whether there should be a national website for authorised law reports similar to the ICLR for England and Wales. He then discussed whether there should be an Australian 'Restatement of the Law' project similar to the United States model and finally whether Australian newspapers could and should be encouraged to cross-reference articles and case summaries to law reports available online. Currently in Australia, newspapers often include case summaries but don't include references or web links to the transcript on web sites such as AustLII.

In between the presentations and the suppliers' exhibition there was a chance to meet some of the other attendees at the conference dinner. This year it was held at a churrasco style restaurant at Circular Quay complete with fantastic views of the Sydney Opera House.

Finally Kirsty McPhee gave a great round up speech and invited everyone to the conference next year in Adelaide on 10 to 12 September 2014. If it is anything like the Sydney conference it is bound to be a great success!

Biography

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Current Awareness

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The 'Cardiff Index to Legal Abbreviations' is available at <http://www.legalabbrevs.cardiff.ac.uk/>

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INFORMATION POLICY

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INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY

Any electronic product; web databases and subject gateways; use of IT generally in law libraries; KM databases; law library intranets

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