



CLIRS & LEXIS kiss and make-up

The dispute between CLIRS and Butterworths Telepublishing Limited (agents for LEXIS in the UK and Australia) over the demise of the EUROLEX service, which had resulted in litigation (see *Computers & Law* #4), seems to have been resolved amicably. *According to a press release from CLIRS:*

CLIRS Limited and Butterworth Telepublishing Limited have signed an agreement to allow CLIRS users in Australia to gateway through CLIRS to the Butterworths UK, European and Commonwealth Libraries on LEXIS, the world's most widely used computer assisted legal research service.

LEXIS was officially launched in Australia by Butterworths on June 20 last year and Butterworths and Mead Data Central, the proprietor of LEXIS, will continue to provide direct access from Australia to LEXIS. Butterworths will also continue to market the service and provide training and customer support.

The gateway access facility will be exclusive to CLIRS and will provide to Australian users with automated access to the Butterworths' Libraries on LEXIS by way of a selection from the CLIRS main menu. A separate subscription to LEXIS will continue to be required.

Through the gateway, CLIRS users will be able to access the full text of over 54,000 English cases, including every

fully reported decision since 1945, tax cases from 1875 and a wide range of selected unreported cases from the beginning of 1980.

The European Library on LEXIS incorporates decisions of the European Court of Justice and European Commission and the Commonwealth Library includes the full text of the New Zealand Law Reports from 1970.

Mr Anthony Gould, Managing Director of CLIRS Limited, said the Company was also negotiating with Mead Data Central to provide gateway access to the American legal materials on the LEXIS service.

Mr Gould said, "Agreement with Butterworths reflects a new approach to international co-operation in legal information. To facilitate the electronic gateway, CLIRS has developed sophisticated software to enable local users to be switched through to a range of international databases with minimum effort."

There are currently more than 1,000 registered users of the CLIRS service.

Canberra to review CLIRS' exclusive rights

The agreement by which CLIRS was given exclusive rights to act as a gateway for SCALE is due for review in July and the Queensland situation is one of the factors to be considered.

In his 1983 statement, Senator Evans said: "To ensure the rational development of a national system which conforms to the agreed standards, the Commonwealth has decided not to release Commonwealth legislation and court judgments for use in other commercial computerised legal information retrieval services for a period of three years. The matter will be reviewed at the end of that period in the light of technological developments and the progress achieved toward a national system."

The distribution of computerised legal information through one system is seen as the most efficient and cost-effective method of introducing the service. It will mean a person seeking legal information will have access in all States to all the laws and judgments in Australia."

"The market for such a service, particularly at this stage of development, is small. To open the field to several operators at this stage could well result in higher charges and increased legal costs."

Meanwhile, CLIRS has announced it has obtained letters of intent from the Governments of South Australia and Tasmania to enter agreements for materials from those States.

Queensland spurns southern STATUS

The Queensland Government has chosen a Brisbane software house and computer bureau, ComputerAcc Pty Ltd, to operate the Queensland computerised legal information system, in preference to CLIRS Limited.

ComputerAcc made a joint bid with Queensland Newspapers Pty Ltd, part of the Herald and Weekly Times Group of Melbourne. The decision was announced by the Attorney-General, Mr Harper, after a recommendation by a committee led by Mr Justice Connolly.

ComputerAcc is obliged to use the STATUS retrieval software, as used by CLIRS and SCALE (the Commonwealth Government's legal database), because of an agreement between Commonwealth and State Attorneys-General to avoid "rail-guage" problems by using STATUS as common retrieval software.

However, this does not mean ComputerAcc will necessarily obtain its version of STATUS from Computer Power, which is a part-owner of CLIRS. A version of STATUS is also marketed in Australia by ICL and it is believed ComputerAcc will use that version.

The Queensland decision raises some important questions for the future of legal information retrieval in Australia. Will there be minor but irritating differences between the operation of the different versions of STATUS?

Will smaller users be deterred from obtaining access to both services, not because of access charges, but because of the need to pay two sets of regular service charges? CLIRS has negotiated "gateways" to Commonwealth materials on SCALE and to English materials on LEXIS, but will it be able to do so to Queensland materials?

Will Queensland lawyers have a ComputerAcc "gateway" to Commonwealth materials on SCALE, or will this only be available via CLIRS?