

Book review:

Public Law in the Age of Statutes – Essays in honour of Dennis Pearce

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Review by
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When I first started practising as a commercial lawyer in Darwin more than twenty years ago, Pearce's *Statutory Interpretation in Australia* and its companion volume dealing with delegated legislation in Australia were staple tools for every commercial lawyer. Even though I let my practising certificate expire last year, I still have well-thumbed, out-of-date editions of Pearce's works on my bookshelf, as a kind of security blanket. When it comes to statutory interpretation questions, the answers to all but the most obscure issues are found in one or other of Pearce's volumes, or at the very least clues are found on how to solve the problem.

In the last few decades it has become apparent that we really do live in an 'age of statutes'. With increasing codification of both the criminal law and common law, Pearce's volumes on statutory interpretation are very much necessary tools for all of today's lawyers.

About five years ago, when I was studying an Australian and New Zealand School of Government Executive Masters Program in Sydney, I had the privilege of meeting Dennis Pearce in person. He was one of the presenters and, when the opportunity arose during a morning tea break to go and speak with him, I quickly made my way over and introduced myself as a lawyer from the NT.

In commercial law terms, Dennis Pearce is something of a celebrity rock star. In spite of his superstar status, Dennis proved to be a very modest and engaging man. I was delighted to learn from Dennis that he has a NT connection. Early in his career in the 1950s, he served as an Associate to the Honourable Justice Kriewaldt of the NT Supreme Court. If my memory serves me correctly, Dennis recalled fondly his time in the NT, particularly when the Judge was sitting in Alice Springs.

Those of us that have studied at the NT University and its predecessors, and who have been lucky enough to have taken Dean Mildren's legal history course, will remember Justice Kriewaldt's interest and concern for Indigenous people of the NT and their treatment in the Australian legal system. I can only wonder whether his time in the Territory shaped Dennis Pearce's future career in the law.

The inspiration for this book arose from a 2014 conference to celebrate the life and work of Dennis Pearce. This book is a collection of the presentations at that conference. The papers are a heart-warming collection of observations of current trends in statutory interpretation and, although the volume is not a textbook in the traditional sense, it would be a valuable addition to the library of any lawyer who has more than a passing interest in the subject of statutory interpretation.

