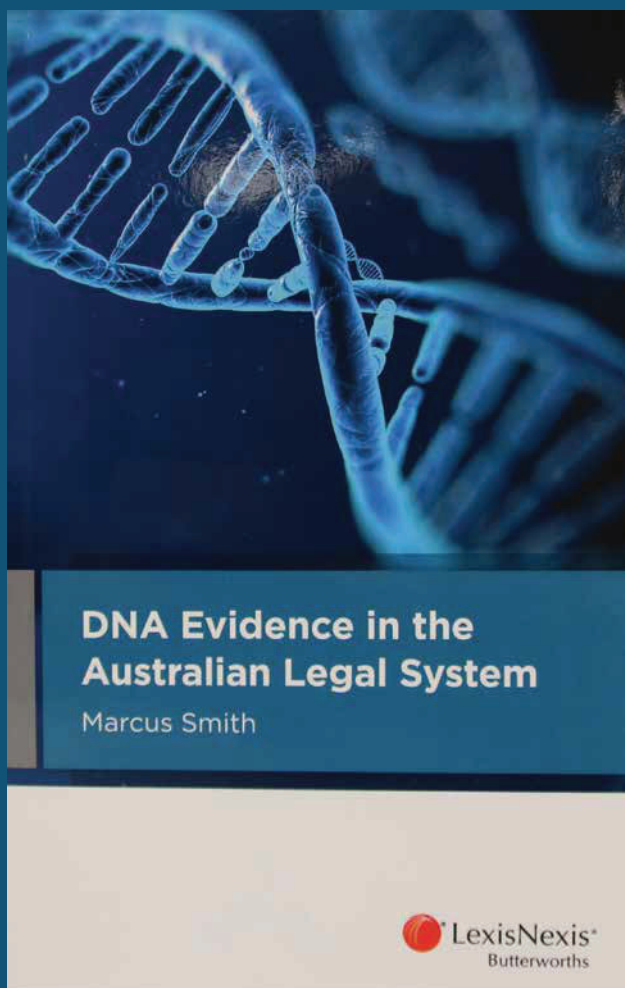


Book review:

DNA Evidence in the Australian Legal System

by Marcus Smith

Jessica Holgersson
Halfpennys Lawyers



The use of DNA evidence in criminal investigations has gained significant attention around the world since its mainstream introduction in the 1990s. And yet there are few texts that focus on this subject from a legal perspective rather than a scientific one.

DNA Evidence in the Australian Legal System is intended to fill this gap in the market, and the author, Marcus Smith, is certainly a suitably qualified expert on the subject matter. Currently an adjunct Professor of Law at the University of Canberra, he has previously worked as a Principal Research Analyst at the Australian Institute of Criminology.

The book is separated into five chapters. It begins by outlining the scientific foundation – including the historical development and the scientific and mathematical basis of DNA profiling. Smith tells of the first use of DNA profiling in 1987, in what is known as the Pitchfork case. This initial chapter also briefly looks at the high profile case of OJ Simpson in the 90s, which raised new issues regarding contamination in the use of DNA evidence. And our own Territory even rates a mention – with the author going in to some detail about the focus on a smear of blood on a t-shirt in the 2004 trial of John Bradley Murdoch.

Chapter 2 concentrates on issues around the collection, testing and management of forensic biological material. Smith describes the three ways that DNA material is primarily used – being the taking of samples from a crime scene or victim; the taking of samples from a suspect or