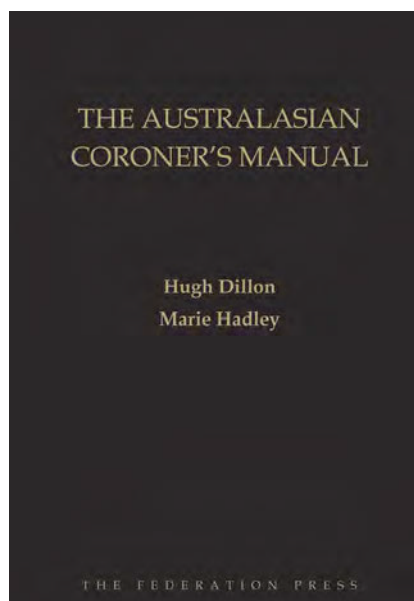


The Australasian Coroner's Manual

By Hugh Dillon and Marie Hadley | The Federation Press | 2015



For those who practise in coronial law (on either side of the ditch) or who simply enjoy good research and writing, this elegant volume is an important addition to a discerning library.

Local practitioners will already be reliant on the most recent edition of *Waller's Coronial Law in NSW*, of which Hugh Dillon is a co-author. This new addition to the coronial landscape undertakes a necessary and different task to that work.

Here the mission is to provide a comprehensive guide to the coronial process, beyond an analysis of legislation and case law. In his thoughtful Foreword, the Honourable Justice Michael Wigney (himself no stranger to the coronial jurisdiction in a past incarnation) describes this book as 'a tremendously helpful manual'. I agree.

A novel focus of the *Manual* is that it proposes material for consideration by coroners as well as by advocates. The usefulness of this is at least twofold. Given the increasing complexity of the work of coroners, this volume will be a useful primer for those judicial officers

coming newly to this ancient role. Beyond that, an understanding of the likely challenges for a coroner conducting the inquiry (both before and at inquest) will provide particular insights for the thoughtful coronial advocate. As we all appreciate, understanding what might be exercising the judicial mind cannot hurt in trying to feed it appropriately.

Apart from the identification of systemic and institutional challenges for the inquisitor within the process, Dillon and Hadley propose a number of possible personal challenges for coroners. This represents a departure from the received practices of 'how to' tomes by considering, for example, the questions for one's mental health raised by working in such a confronting area and particular ethical challenges that arise for coroners in determining what invasive procedures can properly be approved, or not, as part of the autopsy process.

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The coronial process, properly executed, requires a particular place of respect for those who are bereaved. Sensitive acknowledgment of the pain the family carries, by coroners and lawyers, means proper forensic work can be undertaken without adding to those personal burdens.

To that end, apart from analysing the effect of grief for those engaged professionally in the process, Dillon and Hadley focus on the effect of death on

kin generally and distil understandings of the bereavement practices of a range of racial and cultural groups. This material is illuminating on the simple human level and will appeal to that rare creature in the legal community – the amateur anthropologist. For those working regularly in this area, the insights to be gained from this section of the *Manual* are immeasurable.

Chapter 8 – Aspects of Advocacy in the Coronial Jurisdiction – is likely to become particularly well-thumbed. Given that one of the authors is a very experienced and highly respected deputy state coroner in New South Wales, the term 'from the horse's mouth' springs to mind when reading and re-reading these thoughts about how to improve advocacy – whether as counsel assisting, or appearing for the family, a person of interest or others seeking leave to appear. A quote within a quote is a reliable feature of many reviews and, so, consider this; 'Chester Porter's sage observation 'Is it really desired that a particular subject be opened up? Many good advocates say little at inquiries' has much to recommend it.' The tip here is 'less can be more'.

The same might fairly be said about the *Australasian Coroner's Manual*. Well researched and comprehensive, it remains a slender volume, pared down to the necessary, like a careful advocate's questioning. Beyond its disciplined scope, the resonant feature of this work is the humane and considered voices of the authors lighting the way in what can otherwise be a gloomy endeavour.

Reviewed by Warwick Hunt SC