Promoting global trade

Murdoch University Library has become the first Australian depository library for the World Trade Organisation.

The World Trade Organisation (WTO), which is the successor to GATT, is the newest and probably one of the most important of the specialised agencies of the United Nations. It is generally responsible for promoting global trade and has a number of specific programs to administer, including the freeing up of intellectual property rights; the establishment of codes concerning the trade in banking and insurance services, and in the transfer of technology; the negotiation of agreements in the areas of agriculture, minerals and textiles; and in the settlement of international trade disputes.

Following an approach from Professor Michael Blakeney, the Dean of the School of Law, the WTO has consented to granting the Murdoch Library depository status. This will mean that the library will receive free of charge one copy in English of all WTO publications. This collection of documents will enhance the research capacity of Murdoch University's Asia Research Centre and will play a very important role in the activities of the Asia Pacific Intellectual Property Law Institute, recently established by the Schools of Law and Economics and Commerce. ∎

(l to r): Jean Kotai, Nada Nadanasabapathy and Soun Wong view the initial consignment of WTO publications

Catering for the needs of pollies

A perspective from the Commonwealth Parliamentary Library

What are the pros and cons of Australia becoming a republic? Which overseas countries are republics, how do they operate, and what problems do they have? What significant statements have been made on this issue in the last five years by the Government, the Prime Minister, and the Opposition and its Leader? Who in the community has spoken out for or against it, and what are their arguments? What do the opinion polls say?

These are some of the aspects of just one issue to which the Commonwealth Parliamentary Library may be asked to respond.

Its primary mission is to service the information and advice needs of the Senators and Members and their staff, assisting them in debate, policy formulation, committee work, media releases and interviews, constituency work and in keeping abreast of issues and opinion. About 60 000 enquiries are received each year, and a range of anticipatory services (including an SDI service and a wide range of publications) are also provided.

It is probably the largest special library in the country, having a staff of over two hundred and an annual budget of over $16 million.

As well as providing the more conventional library and reference services, the Parliamentary Library also offers, through its Parliamentary Research Service (PRS), advice on policy options and on current and future issues.

Of particular note is the subject specialisation which is used in the Information Services area and in the PRS. There are teams of librarians in each of six major subject areas. The specialist librarians also have responsibilities in collection development.

The print media is monitored, and extensive information files of press clippings and press releases are maintained. The electronic media is also monitored, and content notes and transcripts are added to the library's database, the Information Storage and Retrieval (ISR) system, which also includes journal articles and the full text of press releases.

Resources available on the Internet are playing an increasing role in providing information required to respond to enquiries, and subject pages providing links to major resources are maintained to facilitate access. As Parliament moves to provide desktop access to the Internet for Senators and Members, the library expects to have a role in assisting them to identify and make use of Internet resources. The library's World Wide Web pages (http://library.aph.gov.au/library/) offer a wealth of information about Parliament, drawn largely from the Parliamentary Handbook.

Alan Wilson
Department of the Parliamentary Library