

Freedom of Information

UNIVERSITY OF N.S.W.
22 JUL 1986
LAW LIBRARY

Review

ISSN 0817 3532

ISSUE No. 5

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Credits

The Freedom of Information Review is published six times a year by the Legal Service Bulletin Co-operative Ltd.

Editors: Moira Paterson and Paul Villanti

Editorial Committee: Peter Bayne, Peter Hanks, Kate Harrison, Laurence Maher, John McMillan

Editorial Co-ordinator: Elizabeth Boulton

Typ setting: Kasia Graphics, Jan Jay

Layout: Peter Robinson

Subscriptions: \$30 a year or \$15 to LSB subscribers (6 issues)

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Registered by Australia Post—Publication No. VBG 7600.

This issue may be cited as (1986) 5 *Fol Review*.

Comment

The Federal Attorney-General recently announced the intention of his government to make substantial amendments to the Federal Freedom of Information legislation. The *Freedom of Information Laws Amendment Bill*, which was introduced as part of the budget package, will, if enacted, have the effect of substantially increasing the costs of access thereby placing the legislation beyond the financial reach of many potential users.

The Bill was introduced despite the fact that the Senate Standing Committee on Constitutional and Legal Affairs and an Inter-Departmental Committee are presently reviewing the operation and administration of the legislation, including the question of costs. Although the Government has not ruled out the possibility of accommodating any recommendations proposed by these two bodies, it seems unlikely, given the present economic situation that it would be prepared to adopt any recommendations which would have any adverse effect on its financial estimates. The proposed amendments are outlined and discussed by John McMillan in our feature article.

On a more encouraging note, there have been two developments which should improve the accessibility of government information in Victoria. First, a recent report prepared at the request of the Minister for Property and Services has recommended as a matter of high priority the introduction of a 30-year rule for access to public records in Victoria. In a second major development, the Minister for Local Government has released a paper titled 'Principles for a new Local Government Act' which set out the principles upon which the proposed new access provisions governing local councils will be drafted. These are that the public will be given the opportunity for close involvement in the decision-making processes of local councils and that the public will be permitted greater access to the meetings of councils and their committees. Municipalities were a late exclusion from the Victorian *Freedom of Information Act* and it is to be hoped that similar access rights will be provided in the proposed new legislation.

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