

## REMARKS AT CELEBRATION OF 20 YEARS OF AUSTLII

SUPREME COURT LIBRARY: 30 NOVEMBER 2015

The Honourable Justice Cameron Macaulay

Distinguished guests, ladies and gentleman, I am delighted to have been asked by the Chief Justice to represent her Honour at this very important function. As Chair of the Law Library of Victoria, a multi-jurisdictional law library built upon the foundation of the Supreme Court Library, and as Chair of the Council of Law Reporting in Victoria, I share a particular interest and concern with all of you about facilitating the widespread dissemination of legal information.

I am equally delighted that this function can be held in the Supreme Court of Victoria and in this lovely library space. It is fitting that this place be chosen as the *Victorian* venue to mark AustLII's 20 years. From the very early days of AustLII, the Supreme Court of Victoria has been a keen supporter and partner. This Court was one of the first to be involved with arranging the supply of decisions for publishing on the AustLII website. Ever since, we have managed as a high priority to get our decisions to AustLII as soon as possible – AustLII is, for the Library and the Court, a daily high priority.

So, over twenty-plus years the Library has maintained a **daily** relationship with the dedicated team at AustLII. The Library would particularly like to note in appreciation, Trevor Roydhouse, whose unfailing assistance in times of need has been highly valued. The staff of the Library will miss him and wish him well in retirement.

We have collaborated with AustLII on projects on many occasions. For example: we supported AustLII's project to make Victoria a model jurisdiction

for free access to law; we are in partnership with AustLII's Australian Research Council's 'Linkage Project', donating time and money; and we provided a historical backset of unreported judgments to AustLII in 2012.

It is instructive to read the brief history of AustLII in the brochure we have been provided. We can see that it emerged in 1995 after 10 years of a research project involving Professors Mowbray and Greenleaf, and others, known as the Datalex Project. AustLII first began with Commonwealth content but by 1999 it was extended to incorporate the legislation and superior court decisions of the States, becoming a world-first 'national collection'.

Many practitioners today would not know a legal world without AustLII and may not appreciate the revolution it inaugurated. Today, 'AustLII' is so thoroughly and naturally connected with the concept of ready access to cases and legislation that its existence seems a 'given', akin to traffic lights on street corners.

In the words of Justice Michael Kirby back in 2008: "*AustLII has made law so accessible*".

Our librarians tell me that the introduction in 1998 of medium neutral citations was the real game changer for legal publishing. AustLII enjoys and deserves credit for spearheading this change. Adopting the medium neutral citation protocol enabled the automation of content gathering and retrieval on the scale that AustLII has been able to achieve. At the time, this was visionary.

The 20 year time line set out in the brochure is a breathtaking romp of innovation after innovation. But what has remained a constant for its users is its simplicity and trusted familiarity. Since first envisaged, AustLII has stood

the test of time. In essence the features enjoyed by early adopters are still those enjoyed by today's users:

- the speed of publication due to automated processes,
- the use of text base content to enable minimum file size and downloads, and
- the logically structured layout providing quick access to the vast resources within.

The scope and breadth of the content available on AustLII is enormous: it has 700 separate databases. Let me give one simple example of the *breadth* of impact AustLII has had on access to legal information and how it has brought that information *to us*. My example is the Australian Treaty Database – the Commonwealth's treaty collection. In times past a Library would either have had to subscribe in hard copy or contact the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade and ask for supply. No longer. The collation, digitisation and release of this content is typical of the great improvement to legal research that AustLII has made in their 20 years. And, so I am told, there are literally hundreds more examples like this – content that you don't know you need, until you need it.

It is also worth highlighting AustLII's inspiration for and collaboration with Legal Information Institutes in other countries through a consortium aptly named "WorldLII". WorldLII is an excellent gateway to legal information of other countries, both familiar and unfamiliar. The history of that unfolding story is also recorded on the 20 year timeline. Add to that AustLII's free-access case and journal article citator, LawCite, and the whole package is a fabulously efficient research tool.

One other benefit of 'access to information' should not go overlooked. Oddly enough, it is access for judges. As a judge of this court, AustLII is the vital resource used to keep in touch with the decisions of my colleagues, as well as those judges of other courts. Once upon a time, knowledge of what a fellow judge had recently decided in a like matter depended, unless and until a case was reported, on a somewhat ad hoc method of communication around the corridors. Now, because our decisions are posted on AustLII very soon after if not on the day they are published in court, these decisions are both visible immediately and conveniently stored for searching. I am sure that facility contributes to both the quality and consistency of our decision making.

This Court enthusiastically welcomes AustLII and its guests, congratulates AustLII on its many achievements in the past 20 years, and wishes you every success in the years ahead.