

Things are different in the Territory

Robbie Braithwaite, senior reference librarian

It is often said that the Northern Territory is different. Witness the recent euthanasia legislation, for a start. One thing that is certainly different is the Territory's parliamentary library service. Known as the Northern Territory Library, and comprising both the State and Parliamentary Library service in one joint-use facility, it is unique in the Australian context.

The first parliamentary library in the Territory was established in 1963 as the Legislative Assembly Library, and was the responsibility of the Clerk of Bills and Papers. At the time of

and staff within the library. These, of course, are much expanded on what was available previously. The staff now numbers nineteen full-time positions, not including technical services, electronic information access, and planning and support services staff, who are housed in another building across from Parliament House.

The Northern Territory Library provides access to a general collection of over 70 000 monographs; reference services, including a large range of CD-ROM and on-line databases;

the Northern Australia Collection, a comprehensive collection of publications relating to the Territory, plus computer-based indexes to the *NT News* and the collection of over 50 000 historical photographs; inter-library loans; over 2500 current serial titles and ninety current newspapers, many with years of back issues available; Australian Commonwealth and State government publications, including ABS titles; and the Thea Schmitz Collection of rare and valuable books.

There are a number of services aimed specifically at Members. They include the production of a current awareness bulletin and research papers; a clippings service; a vertical file service; a collection of government publications; a serials circulation service; a loans service; parliamentary databases; and a lobby room service. The latter involves the display of a selection of current journals, occasional papers, research papers, and relevant articles from periodicals and newspapers in both lobby rooms. Also available to the Members are hotline telephones with direct access to the reference desk which is staffed for extended hours during sittings. Extensive use is now being made of the Internet for research purposes, and this is exemplified by the research carried out by Northern Territory Library librarians to gather information required in the formative stages of the Northern Territory's euthanasia legislation. Library staff were largely instrumental in getting the text of the legislation made available on the World Wide Web.

The Northern Territory Library is, like many other aspects of Territory life, different. If OED definitions are to be used, we would like that difference to be thought of as not so much 'divergent' or 'unlike', but rather 'out of the ordinary, special'. ■



The combined Northern Territory Library and Parliament Building

self-government in 1978 it was still very small. In 1980 the Department of Chief Minister's Library was set up to serve the Administrator, Ministers, and Members of the Legislative Assembly. The two libraries amalgamated in 1987 to become the Parliamentary Library of the Northern Territory, with a staff of two (later increased to three) and a collection which included approximately 13 000 monograph titles.

The stage for the most recent make-over was set more than five years ago when the Northern Territory Government announced that the State Reference Library, the largest public library in the Territory, would relocate to the new Parliament House building and merge with the Parliamentary Library. After years of planning and discussions, the new entity opened its doors to the public in early January 1995.

Since the creation of the Northern Territory Library, the twenty-five members of the Legislative Assembly and other Legislative staff, the staff of the Chief Minister's Department, and the staff of the Office of the Administrator have had access to all the newly-combined facilities

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