

MEDIA, TECHNOLOGY AND THE PUBLIC

MEDIA LIAISON

The Commission employed a Media Liaison Officer for the first time in April 1999. Ms Judy Hughes is responsible for media management and certain public information activities of the Commission. The position is based in Melbourne and reports to the President.

INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY

The Commission commenced using on-site videoconferencing facilities on a trial basis in December 1998.

The trial facilities were set up in Commission premises in Melbourne, Sydney and Adelaide. These were supplemented as required by connections with off-site facilities in other locations.

While the Commission had previously used videoconferencing to some degree in the conduct of its business, the introduction of in-house facilities constituted an upgrading of the Commission's capacity to take advantage of technology to undertake its statutory tasks.

Besides conducting hearings via this medium, the Commission also used videoconferencing for internal communication purposes such as meetings between the President and panel heads. The trial is continuing.

HOME PAGE

The AIRC Home Page established in December 1997, continues to play an important role in providing information on the work of the Commission to the public and users of the tribunal. Information available through the Home Page includes daily hearings lists, the text of major decisions, general background on the Commission and its role, contact details and links to related sites. During the reporting period, the site averaged a hit rate per day of 6,000 to 7,000 with an average number of user sessions per day of 300 to 400.

New pages and features were added to the AIRC Home Page in 1998-99 including:

- material relating to the Junior Rates Inquiry and the final report of the Full Bench which conducted the Inquiry;
- a Word Processing Template and Guide to Preparing Draft Awards which is available through the Award Simplification page; and
- the Commission/Registry Annual Report 1997-98.

The address of the Home Page is: <http://www.airc.gov.au>.

OVERSEAS AND OTHER VISITORS

The Director of the South African Commission for Conciliation, Mediation and Arbitration, Ms Thandi Orleyn, visited the Commission from 15 to 24 March 1999. During her time in Australia Ms Orleyn met with Members of the Commission, representatives of peak union and employer bodies and the Minister for Employment, Workplace Relations and Small Business. Ms Orleyn also attended the Members' Statutory Conference. Her visit followed a similar visit by Justice Giudice to South Africa in August 1998.

The Commission also hosted an informal delegation from China as well as student groups interested in learning more about its work. The student groups came from secondary schools as well as colleges and tertiary institutions.

LEGISLATION

The *Workplace Relations Regulations* were amended on 17 December 1998 to exclude certain groups of workers from the unfair dismissal provisions of the *Workplace Relations Act 1996*. These groups included workers employed by businesses with no more than fifteen employees and employees, other than apprentices and trainees, with less than six months continuous service. As part of the same package of changes, the filing fee for federal unfair dismissal applications was increased from \$50 to \$100 from 1 January 1999.

On 16 February 1999 these amendments were disallowed by the Senate. On 17 March 1999 the *Workplace Relations Regulations* were amended to reintroduce a filing fee of \$50.