



## ***UNSW Law & Justice Research Series***

# **Across Time and Jurisdictions: AustLII's Australian Royal Commissions Library**

**Philip Chung, Andrew Mowbray and  
Graham Greenleaf**

[2023] *UNSWLRS* 52

UNSW Law & Justice  
UNSW Sydney NSW 2052 Australia

E: [LAW-Research@unsw.edu.au](mailto:LAW-Research@unsw.edu.au)

W: <http://www.law.unsw.edu.au/research/faculty-publications>

AustLII: <http://www.austlii.edu.au/au/journals/UNSWLRS/>

SSRN: <http://www.ssrn.com/link/UNSW-LEG.html>



## Across time and jurisdictions: AustLII's Australian Royal Commissions Library

**Philip Chung, Andrew Mowbray and Graham Greenleaf\***

Among the most important public documents in Australia, since the nineteenth century formation of the Australasian colonies, are the reports of royal commissions and other executive or legislatively mandated public inquiries, select committees of parliament, and other quasi-legislative or judicial inquisitorial bodies. These documents provide essential context to legislative and judicial developments over time. Together with the reports of Law Reform Commissions,<sup>1</sup> they are often the best source for finding contributions to law reform by industry and interest groups, analysis of the operation of current laws, and well-considered recommendations for law reform. Public inquiries are a trusted mechanism for the investigation of allegations of wrongdoing and maladministration and for the provision of independent policy advice to the executive. They are an essential element of the Australian historical record, providing a valuable resource for researchers in the areas of law, history, politics and public policy.

### Temporary institutions place limits on research

Until the late twentieth century the reports of royal commissions were only made available as selectively issued paper reports included in tabled parliamentary papers, which are of limited accessibility, and were not available online. More recently commissions have established their own websites and publish extensively using this means. However, once the commission has reported, the ongoing maintenance of the website and the material it contains is at some risk and may well be less discoverable, or in some cases not at all. Most earlier reports have not been digitised at all and are thus not available online.

As Kerwin and Narayan observe:<sup>2</sup>

As a result of their functions—both institutional and socio-cultural—royal commissions hold vast archives of important historical material. However, unlike courts or government departments, once the royal commission ends, it ceases to exist. In practice (and at law), then, questions of access, care and responsibility in

---

\* Philip Chung is Executive Director of AustLII and Associate Professor of Law at UNSW Sydney. Andrew Mowbray is Co-Director of AustLII and Professor of Law & Information Technology at UTS. Graham Greenleaf is Senior Researcher at AustLII and Professor of Law & Information Systems at UNSW Sydney. The assistance is acknowledged in developing the Library of Richard Hunter (Development Manager), Jennifer Kwong and David Bramston (Project Officers) and of other AustLII staff but responsibility for content remains with the authors. Development of the Library was supported by ARC Linkage, Infrastructure, Equipment and Facilities (LIEF) grant LE210100043 and partner institution contributions.

<sup>1</sup> Australia's law reform commission reports are comprehensively included in AustLII's *Australasian Law Reform Library* <<http://www.austlii.edu.au/au/special/lawreform/>>.

<sup>2</sup> H Kerwin and M Narayan, 'When the Carnival is Over: The Case for Reform of Access to Royal Commission Records' in Genovese, Luker and Rubenstein (eds), *The Court as Archive* (ANU Press, 2019).

respect of its records leave the 'commission as inquiry' behind, to be answered, often incompletely, by agencies who take, or are left with, responsibility for the commission's archive ... There remains a dearth of attention to the practical and theoretical issues attending royal commission archives.

There are thus no consolidated and searchable collections of royal commission reports even for a single jurisdiction, let alone Australia-wide. It has therefore very been difficult or near-impossible to undertake comparative research across jurisdictions, or across time when researching specific issues.

Researchers have acknowledged<sup>3</sup> that there is a need for more research into the various types of processes used in public inquiries:

Irrespective of the impact of the individual recommendations stemming from the processes used in the case study (in this case child protection and family violence), this article has emphasised that the processes themselves warrant examination. This article fills a gap in the academic literature by comparing different types of processes. There is significant scope for additional research to be undertaken in this area by exploring different topic areas, different jurisdictions and additional domains. This analysis will be of increasing importance as the Victorian government and other governments around Australia continue investing substantial resources into such processes.

In this research, the authors (Mackay and McCahon) provided their own detailed tables of Victorian inquiries, effectively creating their own 'research infrastructure' to enable them to undertake the research.

### Importance of Royal Commissions and public inquiries

In his speech to launch this Library,<sup>4</sup> Commonwealth Attorney-General Mark Dreyfus asked 'What is it that makes royal commissions and similar public inquiries such a significant feature of Australian public life?', and found 'they share some characteristics that perhaps explain their enduring appeal':

- (1) *Independence* 'Within their terms of reference, royal commissions operate independently of the government that commissioned them, and this independence is crucial to building public trust... especially important when the subject of a royal commission involves scrutiny of public administration.'
- (2) *Information-gathering powers* 'Australia's most recent royal commission, inquiring into Robodebt, provides a stark example of an inquiry whose relentless investigation uncovered gross injustices and an abject failure in public administration...'
- (3) *Public accessibility* Also essential is 'Their ability to hear from ordinary Australians, and especially from those who have been let down or pushed aside by other institutions. The Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child

---

<sup>3</sup> Anita Mackay and Jacob McCahon, 'Comparing commissions, inquests and inquiries: lessons from processes concerning family violence and child 'protection in Victoria' (2019) 45(3) *Monash University Law Review* 531, 588.

<sup>4</sup> The Hon Mark Dreyfus KC MP Attorney-General 'Launch of the AustLII Australian Royal Commissions and Public Inquiries Library' Brennan Moot Court, UTS Law Faculty, 23 August 2023 <<https://ministers.ag.gov.au/media-centre/speeches/launch-austlii-australian-royal-commissions-and-public-inquiries-library-23-08-2023>>.

Sexual Abuse, for example, held over 8000 private sessions, hearing testimony of survivors which uncovered shocking institutional abuse.'

### Building a comprehensive Library

In 2021, to address the problems discussed above, AustLII (via its host universities UNSW and UTS) together with ten partner universities (Sydney, Melbourne, Monash, Deakin, Queensland, Adelaide, Curtin, UWA, ANU and UNE) was awarded Australian Research Council (ARC) funding of \$539,000 to support the development of a new facility on AustLII to be called the 'Australian Royal Commissions and Public Inquiries Library'. University partner contributions of \$630,000 provided the balance of the \$1,169,000 project budget. The project was guided by 15 Chief Investigators from the partner universities.<sup>5</sup> The Library is intended to provide comprehensive free access online to the reports of all royal commissions and other public inquiries held in Australia since colonial times, to support a wider understanding of the pivotal role public inquiries play in the development of Australian law and public policy.

The principal reason that AustLII was able to undertake this task is that, since 2006 it has built up serious digitisation infrastructure,<sup>6</sup> through the cumulative acquisition of different forms of digitisation equipment by virtue of earlier successive research infrastructure grants, in addition to this grant. As a result, AustLII staff members have had the opportunity to develop a high degree of expertise in all forms of document digitisation.

This project would also not have been possible without the co-operation and support of several libraries that generously made available to AustLII many rare volumes from their collections for digitisation. We particularly acknowledge the University of Sydney Library, as well as the libraries of the University of Technology Sydney, Macquarie University, Western Sydney University, Monash University, Flinders University, the University of Tasmania and the Tasmanian Parliamentary Library.

To locate physical copies of reports we have relied to a significant extent on the Borchardt series of Checklists up to 1980,<sup>7</sup> which includes the Commonwealth and all

---

<sup>5</sup> Chief Investigators of the project were: A/Prof Philip Chung (UNSW), Prof Andrew Mowbray (UTS), Prof Gabrielle Appleby (UNSW), Prof Anita Stuhmcke (UTS), Prof Thalia Anthony (UTS), Prof Robert Cunningham (Curtin), Prof Mark Lunney (UNE), Prof Matthew Groves (Deakin), Prof Gregory Taylor (Adelaide), Prof Luke Beck (Monash) A/Prof Andrew Edgar (Sydney), Dr Tanya Josev (Melbourne), Dr Dominique Dalla-Pozza (ANU), Dr Vicky Comino (UQ), and Dr Murray Wesson (UWA).

<sup>6</sup> This infrastructure includes: two high speed scanners (DR-G1130 Scanner and Scamax 4x3 performance scanner) for where destructive scanning is possible; a high capacity guillotine necessary for destructive scanning of whole volumes of cases or legislation; a Treventus ScanRobot scanner for non-destructive digitisation, particularly of rare or sensitive documents; a NextScan Flexscan scanner for microforms (microfilm, microfiche etc) where no paper originals are available; and a WideTEK 60CL scanner able to handle A0 documents, such as maps in environmental reports. This physical infrastructure is supplemented by increasingly sophisticated text recognition software, currently ABBY FineReader Server.

<sup>7</sup> D H Borchardt, *Checklist of Royal Commissions, Select Committees of Parliament and Boards of Inquiry. Part I, Commonwealth of Australia, 1900-1950* (1965); *Checklist of Royal Commissions, Select Committees of Parliament and Boards of Inquiry. Part IA, Commonwealth of Australia, 1950-1960* (1973); *Checklist of Royal Commissions, Select Committees of Parliament and Boards of Inquiry. Part II, Tasmania, 1856-1960* (1970); *Checklist of Royal Commissions, Select Committees of Parliament and Boards of Inquiry. Part III, Victoria, 1856-1960* (1970); *Checklist of Royal Commissions, Select Committees of Parliament and Boards of Inquiry. Part IV, New South Wales, 1855-1960* (1975); *Checklist of Royal Commissions, Select Committees of Parliament and Boards of Inquiry. Part V, Queensland, 1859-1960* (1978); *Checklist of Royal Commissions, Select Committees of Parliament and Boards of Inquiry: Commonwealth, New South Wales, Queensland,*

States except Western Australia, supplemented by the Zalums and Stafford Bibliographies of South Australian and Western Australian material.<sup>8</sup> Mintrom et al also prepared valuable tables of royal commissions from all jurisdictions from 1970-2019, and investigated their policy influence.<sup>9</sup> Research and advice, including from CIs, has identified other relevant material published since 1980. To give an idea of the scale of this task, Borchardt and Zalums identify over 3,000 possible inquiry reports published before 1980.

The *Australian Royal Commissions and Public Inquiries Library* <<http://www.austlii.edu.au/au/special/royalc/>> adds to AustLII new databases containing the reports of 3,968 Royal Commissions and Public Inquiries from the Commonwealth and all states and territories, from the mid-nineteenth century.

The Library includes:

- 1,728 Documents of the Reports of Royal Commissions
- 1,185 Documents of the Reports of Boards and Commissions of Public Inquiry
- 2,655 Documents of the Reports of Parliamentary Select Committees of Public Inquiry

Overall, this project has resulted in the addition to AustLII of 5,568 documents and over 527,000 new pages.

Details of the databases in the Library are as in the table following:

*Table 1. Royal Commissions and Commissions of Inquiry Databases on AustLII.*

#		Total Inquiries	Total Documents	Total Sourced & Digitised	% Sourced & Digitised
1	AU Royal Commissions 1902-	150	546	527	97%
2	AU Boards and Commissions of Public Inquiry 1906-	230	312	294	94%
3	AU Joint Parliamentary Select Committees of Public Inquiry 1908-	32	54	53	98%
4	AU Senate Select Committees of Public Inquiry 1902-	63	121	121	100%
5	AU House of Representatives Select Committees of Public Inquiry 1901-	31	50	47	94%
6	UK Royal Commissions Reports Tabled in Australian Parliament 1912-	6	36	33	92%
7	ACT Boards and Commissions of Public Inquiry 2001-	7	10	4	40%
8	ACT Legislative Assembly Select Committees of Public Inquiry 1989-	39	53	53	100%
9	NSW Royal Commissions 1871-	204	276	252	91%
10	NSW Boards and Commissions of Public Inquiry 1856-	171	228	221	97%
11	NSW Parliamentary Joint Select Committees of Public Inquiry 1939-	26	40	40	100%
12	NSW Legislative Assembly Select Committees of Public Inquiry 1916-	426	511	460	90%
13	NSW Legislative Council Select Committees of Public Inquiry 1857-	257	742	639	86%
14	NT Boards and Commissions of Public Inquiry 1987-	3	6	6	100%
15	NT Legislative Assembly Select Committees of Public Inquiry 1974-	16	55	52	95%
16	Qld Royal Commissions 1862-	92	134	120	90%
17	Qld Boards and Commissions of Public Inquiry 1873-	127	129	106	82%
18	Qld Parliamentary Joint Select Committees of Public Inquiry 1865-	17	18	15	83%
19	Qld Legislative Assembly Select Committees of Public Inquiry 1860-	152	162	161	99%
20	Qld Legislative Council Select Committees of Public Inquiry 1860-	31	33	32	97%
21	SA Royal Commissions 1889-	108	185	170	92%
22	SA Boards and Commissions of Public Inquiry 1859-	176	232	205	88%

*Tasmania and Victoria, 1960-1980 and South Australia, 1970-1980* (1986); *Supplement to Checklist of Royal Commissions, Select Committees of Parliament and Boards of Inquiry, 1856-1980*. (1990).

<sup>8</sup> E Zalums, *A Bibliography of South Australian Royal Commissions, Select Committees of Parliament, and Boards of Inquiry, 1857-1970* (1975); E Zalums and H Stafford, *A Bibliography of Western Australian Royal Commissions, Select Committees of Parliament and Boards of Inquiry, 1870-1979* (1980).

<sup>9</sup> Michael Mintrom, Deirdre O'Neill and Ruby O'Connor, 'Royal commissions and policy influence' (2021) 80(1) *Australian Journal of Public Administration* 80.

23	SA Parliamentary Joint Select Committees of Public Inquiry 1945-	3	3	2	67%
24	SA House of Assembly Select Committees of Public Inquiry 1857-	144	146	144	99%
25	SA Legislative Council Select Committees of Public Inquiry 1857-	100	123	121	98%
26	Tas Royal Commissions 1863-	79	94	78	83%
27	Tas Boards and Commissions of Public Inquiry 1857-	100	103	80	78%
28	Tas Parliamentary Joint Select Committees of Public Inquiry 1960-	23	25	24	96%
29	Tas House of Assembly Select Committees of Public Inquiry 1948-	19	30	30	100%
30	Tas Legislative Council Select Committees of Public Inquiry 1961-	67	72	70	97%
31	Vic Royal Commissions 1858-	162	325	323	99%
32	Vic Boards and Commissions of Public Inquiry 1856-	173	221	217	98%
33	Vic Parliamentary Joint Select Committees of Public Inquiry 1887-	7	21	21	100%
34	Vic Legislative Assembly Select Committees of Public Inquiry 1852-	196	255	252	99%
35	Vic Legislative Council Select Committees of Public Inquiry 1857-	48	60	60	100%
36	WA Royal Commissions 1898-	191	238	225	95%
37	WA Boards and Commissions of Public Inquiry 1871-	62	66	62	94%
38	WA Parliamentary Joint Select Committees of Public Inquiry 1892-	19	19	19	100%
39	WA Legislative Assembly Select Committees of Public Inquiry 1870-	95	95	92	97%
40	WA Legislative Council Select Committees of Public Inquiry 1891-	116	149	137	92%
	Total Royal Commissions and Public Inquiries	3968	5978	5568	93%
	- Royal Commissions	992	1834	1728	94%
	- Boards and Commissions of Public Inquiry	1039	1291	1185	92%
	- Parliamentary Select Committees of Public Inquiry	1937	2853	2655	93%
	Total AU	506	1083	1042	96%
	Total ACT	46	63	57	90%
	Total NSW	1084	1797	1612	90%
	Total NT	19	61	58	95%
	Total Qld	419	476	434	91%
	Total SA	531	689	642	93%
	Total Tas	288	324	282	87%
	Total Vic	586	882	873	99%
	Total WA	483	567	535	94%

The Library comprises 83 databases, made up of the 40 databases listed above of reports of Royal Commissions and Public Inquiries, plus 43 virtual databases of related cases, legislation, journal articles and law reform materials, containing over 16,000 searchable items.

These reports are thoroughly integrated with all other resources on AustLII through mean of a 'dynamic virtual library' where the content of the dynamic databases is refreshed regularly by automated processes. This means that, in addition to new databases of commission and inquiry reports, the Library also extracts from all AustLII's existing full collection of case law, legislation, treaties and legal scholarship databases, relevant documents that refer to royal commissions or commissions of inquiry, by automated means. These 'dynamic virtual' databases are then automatically updated daily from all new documents coming into AustLII that day. The entire Library can then be searched for material specific to commissions and public inquiries.



The screenshot shows the homepage of the Australian Royal Commissions and Public Inquiries Library. At the top, there is a navigation menu with links for 'About', 'Contact', 'Copyright & Usage', 'Privacy', 'Disclaimers', 'Feedback', and 'Help'. Below this is a search bar with the text 'Search selected databases'. The main content area is divided into two columns. The left column is titled 'Database' and 'Select a database'. It features a list of jurisdictions: 'All', 'All Royal Commissions', 'Commonwealth', 'Australian Capital Territory', 'New South Wales', 'Northern Territory', 'Queensland', 'South Australia', 'Tasmania', 'Victoria', 'Western Australia', 'Law Journals', and 'Law Reform'. Below this list, there are two main categories: 'Royal Commissions' and 'Commonwealth'. Each category has a list of databases with checkboxes and 'Wordcloud' links. The 'Royal Commissions' category includes: 'Australian Royal Commissions 1902- (AustLII) [Wordcloud]', 'New South Wales Royal Commissions 1871- (AustLII) [Wordcloud]', 'Queensland Royal Commissions 1864- (AustLII) [Wordcloud]', 'South Australian Royal Commissions 1889- (AustLII) [Wordcloud]', 'Tasmanian Royal Commissions 1863- (AustLII) [Wordcloud]', 'Victorian Royal Commissions 1858- (AustLII) [Wordcloud]', and 'Western Australian Royal Commissions 1898- (AustLII) [Wordcloud]'. The 'Commonwealth' category includes: 'Australian Royal Commissions 1902- (AustLII)', 'Australian Boards and Commissions of Public Inquiry 1906- (AustLII)', 'Australian House of Representatives Select Committees of Public Inquiry 1905- (AustLII)', 'Australian Parliamentary Joint Select Committees of Public Inquiry 1905- (AustLII)', 'Australian Senate Select Committees of Public Inquiry 1902- (AustLII)', and 'United Kingdom Royal Commission Reports Tabled in Australian Parliament 1912- (AustLII)'. The right column contains sections for 'ABOUT THE LIBRARY', 'CONTRIBUTORS', 'PRINT', and 'TOOLS & GUIDES'.

Figure 1. AustLII's Australian Royal Commissions and Public Inquiries Library homepage

The above extract of the start of the table of contents of the Library shows that it lists all Royal Commission databases first, then all databases from each jurisdiction in turn, starting with the Commonwealth. These are followed by the virtual databases of Law Journals & Scholarship, and Law Reform, that deal with Royal Commissions and public inquiries. The checkboxes on the left of each database title, and each grouping of databases (mainly jurisdictional) enable considerable flexibility in what is searched, for users who have expertise in this content.

We describe the Library as 'comprehensive' for a number of reasons. First, we included in the Library not only reports of Royal Commissions, but all similar, systematic<sup>10</sup> forms of public inquiry (including Boards, Commissions or Committees of public inquiry; and Parliamentary select committees). Second, AustLII managed to locate 94% of all such 'public inquiry' Reports that were so identified, and all of those (ie 100%) were then digitised. Third, the Library not only includes all Australian jurisdictions, it also has historical depth to the earliest reports in each jurisdiction.<sup>11</sup>

### Examples of use of the Library

The subject matter covered by the reports in the Library is extremely diverse, but by using the titles of the reports we have generated 'word maps' (by jurisdiction) which give some indication of subjects commonly dealt with in reports. There is a separate section

<sup>10</sup> By 'systematic' we mean that the form of the inquiry is repeated over time in relation to various subject-matters, rather than being an ad-hoc, one-off, inquiry.

<sup>11</sup> Earliest reports: Cth 1902; ACT 1989; NSW 1856; NT 1974; Qld 1860; SA 1857; Tas 1853; Vic 1852; WA 1870.

in the Library's Table of Contents for Royal Commissions, with a Wordcloud for each jurisdiction, and an interactive ('clickable') version of each wordcloud which allows searching for materials based on those words.<sup>12</sup>



Figure 2. Wordcloud based on titles of reports of Royal Commissions appointed by the Australian Government (1902-2023).

For example, the wordcloud above is derived from the titles of reports of Royal Commissions appointed by the Australian Commonwealth Government (1902-2023). The Wordcloud suggests, from the size of the words, that ‘disability’ is likely to be a valuable search term, and in fact it is. A search over the whole Library (all jurisdictions) gives 2,079 documents found for ‘disability’. The first page of 10 results includes Royal Commissions of the Commonwealth (Violence, Abuse, Neglect and Exploitation of People with Disability; chemical agents in Vietnam; Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse – 6 separate volumes), Victoria (Family Violence), and South Australia (Child Protection).

The extent to which Royal Commissions have been established by the Commonwealth and State governments has varied over time. The following chart shows the number of Royal Commissions by jurisdiction from the 1850s to 2023.

<sup>12</sup> Interactive wordclouds available at <<http://www.austlii.edu.au/au/special/royalc/>>, on right of each jurisdiction.



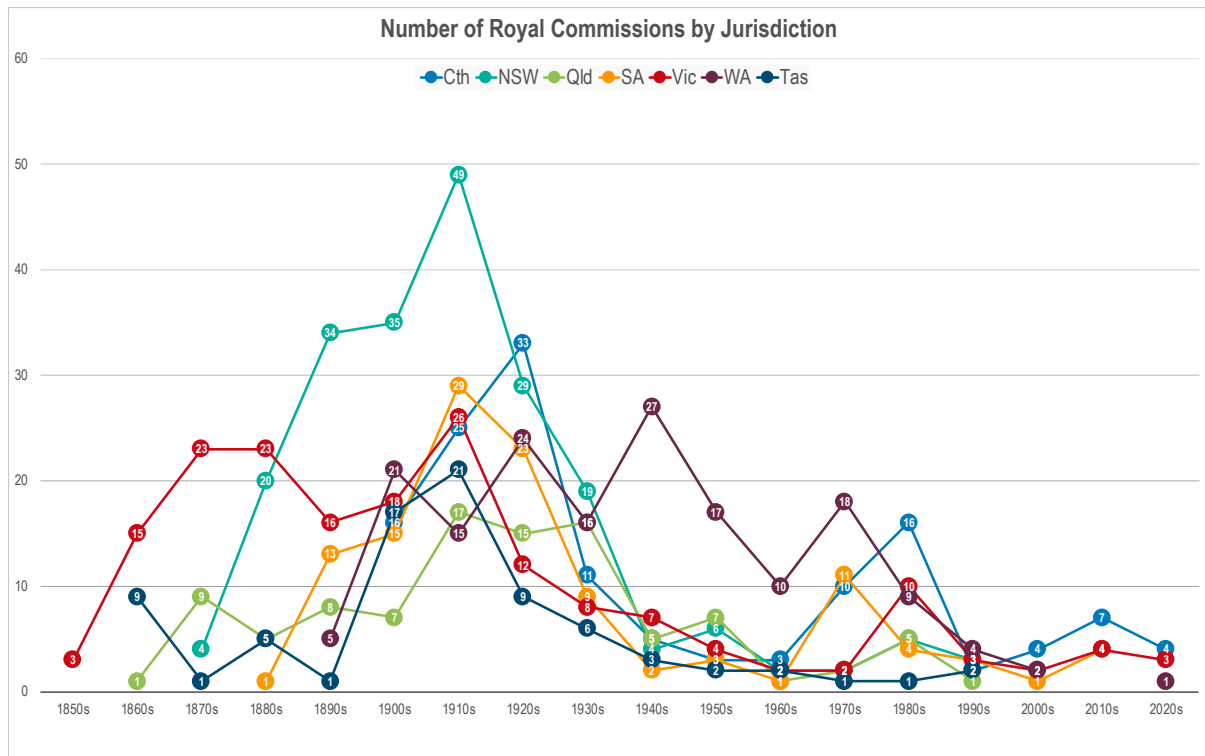


Figure 3. Number of Royal Commissions by Jurisdiction (1850s-2023).

The number of Royal Commissions, usually the most important type of inquiry appointed by governments (ie Commonwealth and States) peaked in the 1910s and 1920s, with a peak of 49 in NSW during the 1910s, rising from 34 in the 1890s. This was preceded by an earlier nineteenth century peak of 23 in Victoria in both the 1870s and 1880s. Common themes for the 1910s across all jurisdictions (77 out of 184 reports) relate to industry (such as sugar, fruit, iron, steel) and transport. The numbers have remained relatively low since the 1920s, at 10 or fewer per jurisdiction, with a few exceptions such as those established by the WA government in the 1940s. Even so, we can say that, across all jurisdictions in post-WWII Australia, in each decade since the 1950s, there have been on average 26 Royal Commissions called. This illustrates the importance of Royal Commissions as an instrument of public policy in Australia.

The total number of the various types of public inquiries is approximately three times as many as Royal Commissions,<sup>13</sup> but a comparison of fluctuations over decades has not been done.

Some other illustrative searches of the Library are as follows:

- A search for ‘Communist Party’ gives over 200 results, but provides in its first ten results two Royal Commission reports (Victoria and Commonwealth) on the Communist Party in the 1950s, the legislation to dissolve the Party, and various journal articles on the High Court decision on the legislation and its significance. The next few sets of ten results show the repercussions of these events in following decades, including in subsequent Royal Commissions and Parliamentary reports.

<sup>13</sup> See Table 1; About 3,000 compared with less than 1,000.

- A search for 'work near safety near mining' includes in its first 20 results (of 88 found) reports from Victoria, the Commonwealth, New South Wales, Queensland, Western Australia and South Australia, dating from 1862 to the present.

By Relevance	By Citation Frequency	By Database	By Date	By Title
Collapse listing				
Australian Coal Industry Tribunal: <a href="#">1 document</a>				
Federal Court of Australia: <a href="#">2 documents</a>				
Federal Circuit Court of Australia: <a href="#">1 document</a>				
Fair Work Commission: <a href="#">1 document</a>				
Industrial Relations Commission of New South Wales: <a href="#">1 document</a>				
New South Wales Industrial Gazettes: <a href="#">5 documents</a>				
Queensland Industrial Gazettes: <a href="#">9 documents</a>				
Supreme Court of Victoria: <a href="#">2 documents</a>				
District Court of Western Australia: <a href="#">1 document</a>				
Australian Resources and Energy Law Journal: <a href="#">1 document</a>				
Balance: Journal of the Law Society Northern Territory: <a href="#">1 document</a>				
Queensland University of Technology Law Journal: <a href="#">1 document</a>				
Sydney Law Review: <a href="#">1 document</a>				
University of New South Wales Law Journal: <a href="#">1 document</a>				
University of Western Australia Law Review: <a href="#">1 document</a>				
Australian Boards and Commissions of Public Inquiry: <a href="#">3 documents</a>				
Australian Royal Commissions: <a href="#">14 documents</a>				
Australian Senate Select Committees of Public Inquiry: <a href="#">5 documents</a>				

Figure 4. Search results for 'work search safety near mining' viewed 'By Database'.

These results also include other types of material available on AustLII which refer to these reports such as journal articles, decisions from courts and tribunals, as well as industrial gazettes.

- A search for '(aboriginal or indigenous) near health' across all jurisdictions provides 825 results, and illustrates the historical depth of the Library. The earliest results include a Queensland inquiry concerning the employment and protection of aboriginal inhabitants in the District of Mackay in 1874, and a Victorian Royal Commission on the Aborigines in 1877. More recent inquiries include one concerning the Queensland Police Service response to domestic and family violence in 2022 as well as a Supreme Court of Victoria case in 2023 referring to the recommendations of the Royal Commission into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody.
- A search for 'people near disability' over only Royal Commission reports produces 148 results across the Commonwealth and five States (NSW, Queensland, South Australia, Victoria, Western Australia) as well as two United Kingdom Royal Commission Reports Tabled in Australian Parliament. The context in which disability issues were being considered ranged from the operation of the system

of public education in Victoria (1867) through to Commonwealth inquiries into institutional responses to child sexual abuse (2017) and aged care quality and safety (2019), and the more recent Victorian Royal Commission on mental health (2021). This illustrates the advantages of the Library for comparative jurisdictional research.

### **'Going forward': Maintaining the Library**

The ongoing maintenance costs of the Library, primarily the cost of updating by digitisation and addition of new Reports of royal commissions, public inquiries, etc to the research infrastructure will be borne jointly by funding provided to UNSW and UTS by the AustLII Foundation Ltd.<sup>14</sup> AustLII has an excellent track record in maintaining infrastructure it has built for over 25 years, with proven expertise in running computing technology physical infrastructure, including prudent risk management policies covering such matters as offsite backup, with multiple server redundancy. Since AustLII will fund these Library 'updates' as part of its annual operating costs, successful maintenance of the Library will depend on the continuation of AustLII's funding.

### **Conclusions**

The online resources developed by this project, integrated with the wealth of other legal resources available on AustLII, creates the most comprehensive research facility on Royal Commissions and public enquiries for researchers and policy analysts, and will enrich contemporary and historical research for all those seeking to better understand developments in Australian law, history, politics and public policy. These resources represent a significant and successful investment in the rule of law in Australia.

The Library was launched on 23 August 2023 and is now available for free access to all. In his launch speech, the Hon Mark Dreyfus KC MP, Attorney-General of Australia summed up the Library by saying that it 'will contain the entire, unbroken history of public inquiries in Australia which, in turn, reveals much about our progress and our values as a nation.' He said 'it will serve as an important public record of the work of royal commissions and other public inquiries in this country...[and] will be an incredibly useful resource for all who take an interest in Australian government and history.'<sup>15</sup>

---

<sup>14</sup> The Foundation is a non-profit company limited by guarantee, the current members of which are UNSW and UTS. It has successfully raised donation funding of over AUD\$1M per year for such purposes, each year since 2007.

<sup>15</sup> The Hon. Mark Dreyfus KC MP (n 4). Mr Dreyfus also said 'AustLII is to be congratulated for making such a great resource accessible to the entire community'.