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doi:10.1017/S1472669611000478

Product Review – ILR on Justis

International Law Reports (ILR) is often described as the only publication wholly devoted to the reporting in English of decisions of international courts and tribunals as well as decisions by national courts on matters of international law. Though recently joined in this field by the online service *Oxford Reports on International Law*[1], ILR includes far more cases and has a much longer pedigree.

The series began in 1929, under the title *Annual Digest of Public International Law Cases*. It has published about 10,000 decisions to date. A highly-regarded publication, it has had an acknowledged impact on the advancement of international law itself. In 1946, the international jurist F. A. Mann applauded its "…achievement which has done so much to promote the rule of law in international affairs…".[2] Writing about ILR in the *Times* obituary of one of its editors, Professor R. Y. Jennings of the University of Cambridge said "the influence of these volumes on the development of international law can scarcely be exaggerated".[3]

First published by Longman and later by Butterworth's, ILR is now a Cambridge University Press title, produced by the Lauterpacht Research Centre for International Law at Cambridge.[4] The editors are Sir Elihu Lauterpacht, Honorary Professor of International Law at the University, and Sir Christopher Greenwood, a judge at the International Court of Justice. Sir Elihu's father, Professor Hersch Lauterpacht, was a

https://doi.org/10.1017/S1472669611000478 Published online by Cambridge University Press

long-serving and distinguished editor of the series before him.

The editorial policy is to cover the available public international law decisions of every international court and tribunal, as far as possible. This includes the rulings of ad hoc arbitral tribunals where concerned with disputes between states, as well as those of standing courts such as the International Court of Justice and European Court of Human Rights. ILR also covers municipal (that is, national) court rulings from around the world in matters of international law.

Annotations to subsequent developments, comparable cases etc are provided by the editors. These sometimes display a remarkable degree of inside knowledge: a footnote to the report of *Coin Security Group (Pty) Ld. v. Smit NO and others* explains that "Counsels" written submissions were filed but were mislaid in the Registrar's office and did not reach the presiding Judge".[5]

In November 2008, almost eighty years after the appearance of the first printed volume, Justis launched an online version of the entire *Annual Digest/International Law Reports* series. It is available in fully searchable form via the Justis.com platform. As well as the text of each case, the electronic version includes the annotations and maps which often form part of the report of territorial disputes.

The introductory *Editorial Notes*, *Prefaces*, *Tables* and *other* preliminary materials found in the printed volumes are not provided online. The tables and indexes, which are published periodically by Cambridge University Press in separate volumes, are also excluded.

Justis's *International Law Reports* has many advantages over the printed volumes and indexes: speed, ease of access, currency of information and search facilities which cover the full-text of the entire series. Although the printed tables and indexes are of high quality and have the merit of considered, consistent analysis, they do not cover the latest volumes and are no substitute for full-text online searching. At the time of writing, volume 139 of the ILR is the latest to have appeared, but the most recent printed tables are only up to volume 125. Online searching is more flexible than print-based research; for example, if a particular case is sought and only the respondent's name is known, the report can still be found by name on Justis, but the printed table of cases will not help.

The usual Justis Cases screen applies to ILR, and generally works well. The default search form permits searches by citation, party names, court, subject, year and/or terms occurring in the headnote. It also offers full-text searching, as mentioned above. The search form can be customised by the addition or removal of individual fields, if desired.

The *Parties* field applies to all case names, including those with descriptive titles such as *Competence of the General Assembly for the Admission of a State to the United Nations*. Such titles are not uncommon in international cases. I came across one apparent glitch in the database indexing: the case *In re Tamasese*[6] does not come up in a *Parties* search, although a *Full Text* search does find it. Other cases entitled "In re…" are successfully retrieved, however.

The *Subject* field allows detailed research by topic. It searches the catchwords, which are often numerous in *International Law Reports*. The *Headnote* field searches the case summary.

The *Court* field can be used to search ILR not just by the name of the court, but also for municipal cases by jurisdiction. This is because ILR gives the name of the jurisdiction together with that of the municipal court, for example, "Norway, Court of Oslo", but because the search form is a generic one for all Justis law reports, the field description on the database does not mention this potential use. It would, of course, be necessary to take account of changing terminology in this sort of search: "Rhodesia or Zimbabwe", "Holland or Netherlands", and so on.

Although the *Year* field is described by Justis as the year of publication, it actually retrieves cases by the year of the decision. Thus, a search for "*1971*" brings up *Public Prosecutor v N.C.J* [7], which was decided in 1971, but not published that year. It appeared in ILR in the late 1980's and the report in ILR cites two Dutch sources dating from 1973 and 1974. ILR often publishes cases years after the decision was made, no doubt due to the practical difficulties of gathering reports from all over the world and translating many of them. There is in fact another Justis field called *Date*, which is not part of the default search form. It can be selected by clicking on the *Customise* button towards the bottom of the screen. Its field description says that it applies to the date of the decision and in practice it does so.

All publications available on Justis can be browsed using the *Index* and *Contents* screen. However, this is a rudimentary and disobliging facility. It operates by means of plus signs which open folders, but the last plus sign does not open anything. Instead, it triggers a message saying "You have reached the lowest level of the hierarchy". The user is instructed to make a selection using a check box, then scroll all the way back up to the top of the screen to click on "Display results". Only then do the selected cases appear. A redesign of this screen would be very welcome.

Redundant plus signs aside, the *Index* and *Contents* screen allows ILR to be browsed either by year of decision, then volume number or, if you select *Change Hierarchy*, by volume number, then year. However, the volume numbers, strangely, are not presented in an ordinary numerical sequence: the list begins 1, 10, 100, 101, 102 … followed by all the volume numbers starting with 2 etc.

Incidentally, there appears to have been an editing error on the part of Justis in the first case in the year index. It is listed under "1902", and the case digest is headed "12 June 1902", but the digest itself says the case was decided on "10 January 1939". The incorrect date

https://doi.org/10.1017/S1472669611000478 Published online by Cambridge University Press

heading does not appear in the printed original. The "1902" date actually refers to that of the Hague Convention with which the case is concerned.

It is probably easier to browse by volume number or year via the search screen. Researchers can enter the volume number and the abbreviation *ILR* in the *Citation* boxes to bring up a list of all the cases in that volume. After searching by the *Year* field, which usually retrieves a large number of cases, the results can be re-sorted by case name to facilitate browsing; to do this, click on the column heading *Title and Subject*.

The digitisation of *International Law Reports*, consisting of around a hundred years' worth of public international law decisions, is a substantial achievement by Justis Publishing. Although one or two quirks have been identified in the database, these do not detract substantially from its value as a research tool. Practitioners, scholars and information professionals will all benefit from its flexible, comprehensive search facilities and the convenience of access at their own desks.

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Footnotes

[1]http://www.oxfordlawreports.com/
[2]F. A. Mann (1946) International Affairs 22 (1), p. 104.
[3]Prof R. Y. Jennings (1960) The Times, May 10, p. 16.
[4]http://www.justis.com/data-coverage/international-law-reports.aspx
[5](1990) 103 ILR 1, 3.
[6](1929) 7 ILR 42.
[7](1971) 73 ILR 374.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S1472669611000478 Published online by Cambridge University Press