



Commonwealth Legal Information Institute

User Guide to CommonLII

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Check the CommonLII website <<http://www.commonlii.org/>> for later versions.

Essentials: Free access, Commonwealth coverage

The Commonwealth Legal Information Institute (CommonLII) <<http://www.commonlii.org>> provides:

- Over 1,400 **full text Databases** from 60 Commonwealth and common law countries and external territories (see separate CommonLII Databases list).
- A **Catalog** of nearly 10,000 websites from all Commonwealth and common law countries and territories. There is also a **Websearch** facility that allows searches of the content of many (but not all) of the websites in the Catalog.
- A '**Law on Google**' facility for all Commonwealth jurisdictions, which assists users to more easily find legal materials from a particular jurisdiction using the Google search engine.

CommonLII therefore provides three methods of finding law from across the Commonwealth.

Access to everything CommonLII provides is free to users. The majority of databases available via CommonLII are located on the following cooperating Legal Information Institutes (LIIs).



This User Guides describes browsing and searching in relation to CommonLII and the databases located on CommonLII (rather than on another LII), so there will be some variation with other LIIs.

Browsing the Databases

To find all databases for a country, select the name of that country from CommonLII's front page to go to the country's page in CommonLII. The databases are listed first on the country page, under 'Databases'. Select the name of a database to go to its home page, which shows the number of items in the database, the range of years from which they are derived, the date of the most recent item added and both annual and alphabetic tables of contents (both may not be available in some cases).

Legislation databases

Front page of each database

There is some variation of wording between the LIIs, but all provide the following functions:

- | | |
|----------------------------|---|
| [Database Search] | limits scope of search to database named at the top of page. |
| [Name Search] | limits scope of the search to names of Acts in this database. Search with keywords in the title of a known Act. |
| 'Last updated: ...' | most recent date database was updated on system; |

NOTE- does not indicate legislation is consolidated to that date.

Additional buttons on each Act or section (if available - depends on database)

[\[Index\]](#) [\[Table\]](#) [\[Search\]](#) [\[Notes\]](#) [\[Noteup\]](#) [\[Previous\]](#) [\[Next\]](#) [\[Download\]](#) [\[Help\]](#)

| | |
|-------------------|---|
| [Table] | goes to the Act's table of contents, at the entry for this section. |
| [Search] | goes to the Full Search Form. |
| [Notes] | displays notes associated with current Act; amendment histories etc. |
| [Noteup] | searches automatically for all materials on LII which refer to this section. |
| [Previous] | goes to preceding section in Act; use for 'stepping back' through an Act. |
| [Next] | goes to the next section in the Act; use to 'step through' sections of an Act. |
| [Download] | downloads copy of whole current Act (not single section); choose ASCII or (if available) RTF; if ASCII, print or save using normal browser commands |

To go back to the home page of a database, choose its name in the 'You are here' line: eg -
'You are here: CommonLII >> Databases >> **Indian Legislation** >> Patents Act 1970'

Case Law databases

There is some variation of wording between the LIIs, but all provide the following functions:

| | |
|---------------------------|---|
| [Database Search] | limits search to only the current database. |
| [Name Search] | limits scope of search to titles of cases in current database only. |
| [Recent Decisions] | displays most recent cases added, by date of the case. |

Searching the Databases

There are 3 search options: from the front page, a country page, or the Advanced Search page

- The **Front page search** is at the top of CommonLII's front page - use to search all databases
- The **Country page search** limits searches only to databases from the country that has been chosen; it also allows searches of the Catalog/Websearch or Law on Google, for material from that country.
- The **Advanced Search Form** (accessed from the front page) allows various special searches that cover all Commonwealth countries but only some materials (eg legislation); it also allows special search types.

Connectors (used for all 3 search options)

| Operator | Meaning | Example |
|-------------------|---|---|
| and | page contains both terms | negligen* and defam* |
| or | page contains either of two terms | weapon or gun or firearm or pistol |
| not | page contains 1st term but not 2nd | trust not family |
| near | 1st term is within 50 words of 2nd | disclos* near offence |
| w/n or /n/ | 1st term is within <i>n</i> words of 2nd | court w/5 jurisdiction |
| pre/n | 1st term must precede 2nd term by less than <i>n</i> words | contempt pre/3 court |
| () | Always use parentheses if search includes two types of connectors | contempt near (radio or television) |
| n * | Use * for truncation | 'negligen*' finds negligent, negligence, negligently etc |
| | Regular plurals, and singulars, are searched automatically | 'firearm' = 'firearms' and vice-versa 'treaty' = 'treaties' and vice-versa |

Searching for phrases – To search for a phrase, put it in double quotes (eg "freedom of information"). This is not necessary for a Boolean search (ie if connectors are used) but it is better to be sure.

Search terms the same as connectors – If a phrase is searched for which contains a connector, the whole phrase should be put in double quotes (egs “fit and proper person”, “near death experience”).

Display of Database search results

Where Databases are searched, four options allow different displays of search results.



By Relevance – The default results display is by order of likely relevance to the search request, most relevant first. The percentage ranking (‘relevance ranking’) next to each document shows 100% for the first document if it contains all search terms. All others are ranked pro-rata to that document according to number, frequency and location of search terms they contained. The **‘Collapse Multi-sections | Show All Sections’** option makes search results which contain numerous references to legislation more readable by reducing the number of sections visible.

By Date – Results are sorted by date order, most recent date displayed first (ie reverse chronological order). Legislation is displayed by the date the Act was passed or the Regulation made, not by the date on which a particular section or clause was amended. The ‘Collapse Multi-sections’ option is available.

By Title – The results are sorted alphabetically by the title of the document, and displayed from a-z. The ‘Collapse Multi-sections’ option is available. The ‘Collapse Title’ option groups the results together based on the first alphanumeric character in the title, that is, ‘A’ to ‘Z’ and then ‘0-9’.

By Database – The search results are displayed grouped into the databases on which they are located. The databases are displayed in the order in which they appear in CommonLII’s menu structure (not by number of results found in each). To view the results from only one database, click on the number of documents next to the name of the database (Note: to see the results from all databases again, it is necessary to use the ‘back’ button). The ‘Collapse Listing | Expand Listing’ option is only available with the ‘By Database’ display.

Relevance ranking of search results – Search results are displayed ranked by likely order of relevance of the items found (most relevant items first). The percentage ranking next to each document shows 100% for the first document if it contains all search terms. All others are ranked pro-rata to that document according to number, frequency and location of search terms they contained.

‘Context’ - going to the occurrences of search terms [\[Context\]](#) – The ‘Context’ button appears at the top of most documents found in a search. Click on the red arrow to go to the first search term, then forward (or back) on further red arrows to go from one occurrence of search terms to the next. **Wait until the whole document has loaded** before using the ‘context’ button ie when the status line at the bottom of the screen says ‘Document done’.

[PDF] results – If a search result has ‘[PDF]’ in front of it then it can not yet be displayed as a HTML file (a web page), but instead will automatically be downloaded as a PDF (Portable Document Format) file if the link to the result is selected. PDF files are in the original format provided by the data source and do not have internal hypertext links or ‘context’ and other navigation buttons otherwise found on LII documents.

Modifying searches – The Search Results page always displays your current search (or stored search) at the top of the page, allowing it to be modified and another search run.

The ‘Repeat search over:’ box – On the right side of each display of Database search results, the options in this box allow the same search as has just been executed to be repeated over any of 4 other broader sets of data: (i) All CommonLII databases (valuable if only one country has been searched); (ii) Catalog & Websearch (for all countries); (iii) WorldLII Databases (all databases in the World legal Information Institute); and (iv) ‘Law on Google’ (no limitation to one country).

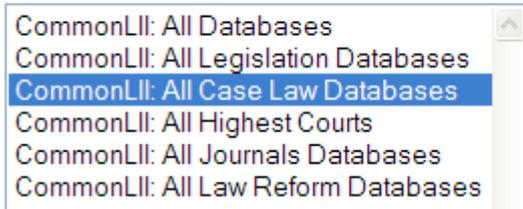
Advanced search

Advanced Search is used principally to choose special 'Commonwealth-wide' selections of databases, and also to select some special search types which it may be easier to use here (a minor usage).

Special selections of databases

The following special selections of databases are available (the default is 'All Databases').

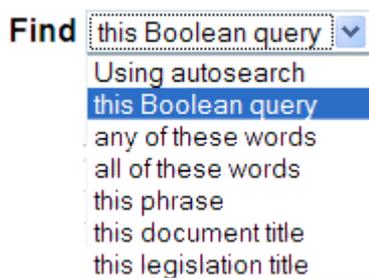
Select the CommonLII Database(s) to search: *Selecting 'All Case Law' on CommonLII*



Remember to change back to 'All Databases' after a search. To change a selection you must return to the Advanced Search Form.

Search type options

The 'Autosearch' method used on the front page and on the country pages of CommonLII tries to work out which type of search the user is conducting and automatically uses that type. The advanced search page allows the choice of 5 other search types (**it is rarely needed, and only by advanced users**):



- **this Boolean query** – (*default option*) any Boolean search may be entered, using logical and proximity connectors (see above). This is the most powerful form of searching, where search results are limited because they must first match the Boolean search, and the results are only then also ranked in likely order of relevance. *Hint* - use reasonably broad searches (to aid completeness), and rely on the relevance ranking then provide more precision.
- **any of these words** – equivalent to putting a Boolean OR between each separate word. Simply enter a few words to indicate the main concepts for which you are looking (eg 'pollution river' or 'program patent'). Equivalent to entering search terms with no connectors on the front page or country page (default option).
- **all of these words** – equivalent to putting a Boolean AND between each separate word.
- **this phrase** - words entered are treated as a literal phrase even if they contain terms normally connectors (eg 'and', 'or', 'near'). There is no need to put inverted commas around the phrase. You can achieve the same thing by putting double quotes around a phrase in any search.
- **this document/legislation title** – only *titles* are searched, not the text. This option is used rarely. You can also limit searches to titles only by using the 'title()'operator (eg 'title(privacy)') .

Searching from country pages – 3 options

On each country page, the following search window appears. The default search scope is 'Databases' for that country (unless it has no databases, in which case 'Catalog & Websearch' is the default).



[\[Search Help\]](#) [\[Advanced Search\]](#)
Search: Databases Catalog & Websearch Law on Google

The Databases search option

The Databases search will search all of the databases listed on that country page, but no others. To search only one of the databases, go to that database's home page and choose the 'Database Search' option (described above). There is at present no way to search a combination of databases from one country (an enhancement is planned).

The Law on Google option

If the 'Law on Google' option is chosen and search terms inserted, then the search is sent to the Google search engine to be carried out, but it is first transformed in three ways in order to make it more useful:

- First, the search syntax used by the CommonLII search engine is translated into those required by Google's search engine (for example, 'or' is translated into 'OR'; phrases are put into quotes; 'circumvent* near copyright' becomes just 'circumvent copyright');
- Second, terms to restrict results to those relevant to the country concerned are added; for example, a search from the India page will have 'India OR site:.in' added;
- Third, a list of law-related search terms is added to reduce the likelihood of sites unrelated to law being found or ranked highly.

It may sound complicated, but it produces good results.

The Catalog & Websearch option

If 'Catalog & Websearch' is selected and search terms inserted, then two results will be displayed.

The search results will first list 'WorldLII Catalog - Categories found:' and list the number of category pages relevant to the country concerned satisfying the search request, followed by the first four categories and a link to '*More WorldLII Categories...*' if there are more.

The search will also search the full text of web sites listed in the Catalog in any of the categories listed on the country page, or those below them in the Catalog. In other words, a search from the 'India' country page should only find websites from India or about India. The results are not as good as the other two options but may sometimes provide additional useful materials. Use this option last.

Browsing the Catalog

The Catalog of websites may be browsed from the categories listed on a country page under the heading 'Catalog and Websearch'. The categories listed relate only to the country concerned. Selecting any of the categories will take the user to the relevant part of the WorldLII Catalog.

These LIIs support CommonLII, and with it participate in the free access to law movement

