

INTRODUCTION TO LAW SUMMARY



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TABLE OF CONTENTS

TABLE OF CONTENTS 2

TABLE OF AUTHORITIES..... 8

TOPIC 1: THE WESTERN LEGAL TRADITION..... 10

1.1 COMMON LAW..... 10

1.2 CIVIL LAW 11

TOPIC 2: ENGLISH LEGAL HISTORY..... 12

2.1 FEUDALISM..... 12

2.1.1 The formal social hierarchy in Feudalism 12

2.2 THE CREATION OF THE COMMON LAW 13

2.2.1 The creation of legal structures 14

2.2.2 The writ system 15

2.2.3 The earliest trial procedures 15

2.2.4 Equity..... 16

2.2.5 The creation of constitutionalism 17

2.2.6 Reforms in the common law and the courts 22

2.2.7 The creation of the legal profession 24

2.3 THE RULE OF LAW 26

TOPIC 3: SOVEREIGNTY AND INTERNATIONAL LAW 27

3.1 WHAT ARE THE TWO DIMENSIONS OF SOVEREIGNTY? 27

3.1.1 Internal Sovereignty:..... 27

3.1.2 External sovereignty:..... 27

3.2 HOW HAS THE MEANING OF SOVEREIGNTY EVOLVED? 27

3.2.1 Pre 17th Century - Europe feudal model of sovereignty:..... 27

3.2.1 17-20 century -Liberal Euro-American model..... 27

3.4 WHAT IS THE ORIGIN OF THE CONTEMPORARY MODEL OF EXTERNAL SOVEREIGNTY? 28

3.4.1 Origins of the model of sovereign interstate governance was C17 Thirty Years War in Europe. 28

3.4.2 What are the 7 key elements of the Westphalian model of external sovereignty? 28

3.4.3 How successful was the Westphalian Model in averting inter-state crises?..... 28

3.5 WHAT EMERGED AFTER 1945 TO REMEDY THE DEFICITS IN THE WESPHALIAN MODEL?..... 29

3.5.1 The UN Charter Model 29

3.5.2 1945 Post War Political and economic reconstruction 29

3.5.3 <i>What are the key assumptions of the post 1945 UN Charter Model?</i>	30
3.6 WHAT IS THE PURPOSE OF THE UNITED NATIONS?	30
3.6.1 <i>Article 1 -The Purposes of the United Nations are:</i>	30
3.6.2 <i>How does UN Charter Article 2 reconcile sovereignty and inter-state cooperation?</i>	31
3.7 INTERNAL SOVEREIGNTY	31
3.7.1 <i>Separation of Powers</i>	31
3.7.2 <i>Principle of Constitutionalism</i>	32
3.7.3 <i>Principle of the Rule of Law</i>	32
3.7.4 <i>Who is the sovereign in Australia?</i>	32
3.7.5 <i>Where does Australian sovereignty come from?</i>	32
3.7.6 <i>Is sovereignty in Australia based on the grant of Imperial sovereign to its colony, or on Popular sovereignty?</i>	32
3.7.7 <i>Constitutionalism in Australia -Compact between the colonies to create a federal state</i>	33
TOPIC 4: AUSTRALIAN LEGAL HISTORY	34
4.1 THE TRANSPORTATION OF ENGLISH CONVICTS	34
4.2 THE ARRIVAL OF LAW TO NEW TERRITORIES	34
4.3 THE DOCTRINE OF <i>TERRA NULLIUS</i>	35
4.4 THE RECEPTION OF ENGLISH LAW IN AUSTRALIA	36
4.5 THE AUSTRALIAN COURT STRUCTURE AND ITS CREATION	37
4.5.1 <i>Bigge’s recommendations – the New South Wales Act</i>	38
4.6 THE CREATION OF THE AUSTRALIAN CONSTITUTIONAL GOVERNMENT	38
4.6.1 <i>The New South Wales Act</i>	38
4.6.2 <i>The Australian Courts Act</i>	39
4.6.3 <i>Australian Constitutions Act (No 1) (5 & 6 Vict, c 76) 1842</i>	39
4.6.4 <i>Australian Constitutions Act (No 2) (13 & 14 Vict, c 59) 1850</i>	39
4.7 CURBING THE EFFECT OF THE REPUGNANCY DOCTRINE	40
4.8 THE JUDICIAL COMMITTEE OF THE PRIVY COUNCIL	41
4.9 THE CREATION OF A FEDERATION AND AUSTRALIAN INDEPENDENCE	42
4.9.1 <i>The Treaty of Versailles</i>	43
4.9.2 <i>The Balfour Declaration</i>	43
4.9.3 <i>The Statute of Westminster 1931</i>	43
4.10 NATIVE TITLE	44
4.10.1 <i>Aboriginal Land Rights (Northern Territory) Act 1976</i>	45
4.10.2 <i>The Mabo case</i>	45
4.10.3 <i>The Native Title Act 1993 (Cth)</i>	46

4.10.4 <i>The Wik case</i>	46
4.10.5 <i>Native Title Amendment Act 1998 (Cth)</i>	46
4.11 INTERNATIONAL LAW	46
TOPIC 5: THE AUSTRALIAN LEGAL SYSTEM	48
5.1 THE COMMON LAW SYSTEM IN AUSTRALIA.....	48
5.1.1 <i>Doctrine of Precedent</i>	48
5.1.2 <i>Hierarchy of Courts</i>	49
5.2 EQUITY	50
5.3 FEDERATION AND FEDERALISM	51
5.4 THE COMMONWEALTH CONSTITUTION AND CONSTITUTIONAL LAW	51
5.5 THE SEPARATION OF POWERS	53
5.6 BRANCHES OF GOVERNMENT	53
5.7 THE EXTENT OF SEPARATION OF POWER IN AUSTRALIA	54
5.8 HOW THE COURTS INTERPRET THE SEPARATION OF POWER	54
5.9 CASE LAW	55
5.9.1 <i>Law reports</i>	55
5.10 LEGISLATION (STATUTES).....	56
5.10.1 <i>How case law and legislation interact</i>	56
5.11 CUSTOMARY LAW	57
5.12 INTERNATIONAL LAW.....	57
5.12.1 <i>Treaties</i>	57
5.12.2 <i>Customary international law</i>	58
5.12.3 <i>How can international law become part of Australian domestic law?</i>	58
TOPIC 6: STATUTE LAW AND STATUTORY INTERPRETATION.....	60
6.1 HOW IS STATUTE LAW MADE?	60
6.2 HOW CAN STATUTE LAW BE AMENDED OR REPEALED?.....	60
6.3 COMMON LAW RULES OF STATUTORY INTERPRETATION	61
6.3.1 <i>Literal Rule</i>	61
6.3.2 <i>Golden Rule</i>	62
6.3.3 <i>Purposive Rule</i>	62
6.3.4 <i>Mischief Rule</i>	63
6.4 RULES OF STATUTORY INTERPRETATION	63
6.4.1 <i>Acts Interpretation Act 1901 (Cth): s 15AA</i>	63
6.4.2 <i>Extrinsic materials: s 15AB</i>	64

6.5 OTHER GUIDES TO STATUTORY INTERPRETATION	65
6.6 COMMON LAW PRESUMPTIONS OF STATUTORY INTERPRETATION	66
6.6.1 <i>Presumptions of interpretation.....</i>	66
6.6.2 <i>Presumptions about individual rights.....</i>	66
6.6.3 <i>Presumptions about procedural matters.....</i>	66
TOPIC 7: THE COMMON LAW AND PRECEDENT.....	68
7.1 HOW IS THE COMMON LAW DIFFERENT FROM STATUTE LAW?.....	68
7.1.1 <i>What is the nature of the common law?</i>	68
7.2 WHAT IS A PRECEDENT?	69
7.2.1 <i>Ratio decidendi.....</i>	69
7.2.2 <i>Obiter dicta</i>	69
7.3 HOW DOES THE DOCTRINE OF PRECEDENT WORK IN PRACTICE?	69
7.3.1 <i>Binding and persuasive judgments in the court hierarchy.....</i>	70
TOPIC 8: LEGAL CONCEPTS.....	72
8.1 LEGAL PERSONALITY	72
8.1.1 <i>What is legal personality?.....</i>	72
8.1.2 <i>Who or what has personality in legal terms?.....</i>	73
8.1.3 <i>Why is legal personality important?.....</i>	73
8.1.4 <i>Personality begins with life</i>	74
8.2 HOW AGE IMPACTS CAPACITY	74
8.2.1 <i>Capacity to be criminally liable</i>	74
8.2.2 <i>Capacity and liability (Reasonable person test)</i>	74
8.2.3 <i>Age impacts on capacity to make contracts</i>	74
8.2.4 <i>Age impact on capacity to consent to medical treatment.....</i>	75
8.3 CORPORATE PERSONALITY	75
8.3.1 <i>What is a corporation?.....</i>	75
8.3.2 <i>Presumptions about the capacity of corporate persons</i>	75
8.3.3 <i>Why extend personality to corporations?</i>	75
8.3.4 <i>Implications of legal personality for corporations?.....</i>	75
TOPIC 9: LIABILITY.....	76
9.1 WHAT IS LIABILITY?	76
9.2 WHY ALLOCATE LIABILITY?	76
9.3 PRESUMPTION	76
9.4 HOW IS LIABILITY ALLOCATED?	76

9.4.1 Criminal liability.....	76
9.4.2 Civil liability.....	76
9.4.3 Corporate liability.....	77
9.5 TORT LAW	78
9.6 CRIMINAL LAW	78
TOPIC 10: CONCEPT OF CONTRACT	80
10.1 WHEN DO AGREEMENTS BECOME BINDING LEGAL OBLIGATIONS (CONTRACTS)?	80
10.1.1 Agreements arise out of mutual promises.....	80
10.1.2 How is a person's capacity relevant to a contract?.....	80
10.2 HOW DO WE DISTINGUISH CONTRACTS FROM OTHER PROMISES?.....	80
10.2.1 Legal contracts must be:	80
10.3 WHY ARE CONTRACTS FUNDAMENTAL TO HEALTHY MARKETS?	81
10.3.1 How does the law create economic certainty, predictability and enforceability?	81
10.4 UNDER THE LEGAL RULES, WHEN IS A PROMISE NOT BINDING AS A CONTRACT?.....	81
TOPIC 11: PROPERTY – REAL AND PERSONAL	83
11.1 WHAT IS OWNERSHIP?.....	83
11.2 WHAT IS PROPERTY? WHAT IS CAPABLE OF BEING OWNED?	83
11.2.1 What forms of property are there?.....	84
TOPIC 12: LAND LAW.....	85
12.1 WHAT IS THE SOCIAL, ECONOMIC AND POLITICAL SIGNIFICANCE OF LAND AS PRIVATE PROPERTY?	85
12.2 HOW DID THE FEUDAL SYSTEM AIM TO ACHIEVE CERTAINTY?.....	85
12.3 HOW ARE FEUDALISM AND ORIGINS OF PROPERTY OWNERSHIP CONNECTED?.....	85
12.4 HOW WAS FEUDALISM IMPORTED INTO AUSTRALIA?	86
12.4.1 1788 British Crown occupied Australia.....	86
12.4.2 Why is terra nullius a 'convenient legal fiction'	86
12.4.3 How was feudal property ownership modernized in Australia?	86
12.5 WHAT WAS THE DEED OF SALE - 'OLD SYSTEM' TITLE?.....	86
12.6 WHAT IS THE 'NEW SYSTEM' KNOWN AS THE TORRENS REGISTRATION SYSTEM?	86
12.7 WHAT CATEGORIES OF INTERESTS IN LAND NOW EXIST IN AUSTRALIA?	87
12.7.1 Real property in Australia is in one of the following forms to ensure certainty:	87
TOPIC 15: INTELLECTUAL PROPERTY.....	88
15.1 HOW AND WHY DOES THE LAW RECOGNISE OWNERSHIP OF IDEAS?	88
15.1.2 What sorts of 'proprietary' knowledge constitute intellectual property?.....	88

15.2 WHAT IS A PATENT?	89
15.3 WHAT CANNOT BE PATENTED?	89
15.4 WHAT IS A DESIGN?	89
15.5 WHAT IS A TRADEMARK?	90
15.6 WHAT IS THE NATURE AND PURPOSE OF COPYRIGHT?	90
TOPIC 16: FIDUCIARY RELATIONSHIPS	92
16.1 HOW DOES CIVIL/PRIVATE LAW CONTROL POWER AND PROTECT THE VULNERABLE?	92
16.1.1 <i>When does a relationship become a fiduciary/principal relationship?</i>	92
16.1.2 <i>Economic relations where fiduciary obligation may arise (the categories are never closed)</i>	92
TOPIC 17: THE ADVERSARY SYSTEM AND ALTERNATIVE DISPUTE RESOLUTION	93
17.1 WHAT IS THE ADVERSARY SYSTEM?	93
17.1.1 <i>What is the inquisitorial system?</i>	93
17.2 WHAT ARE SOME BARRIERS TO THE ADVERSARY SYSTEM?	93
17.3 WHAT IS ALTERNATIVE DISPUTE RESOLUTION ('ADR')?	94

sample

TABLE OF AUTHORITIES

Statutes

Aboriginal Land Rights (Northern Territory) Act 1976 (Cth)..... 45

Acts Interpretation Act 1901 (Cth) 56, 64

Acts Interpretation Act 1915 (SA) 36

Australia Acts..... 44

Australia Acts 1986 (Cth)..... 42

Australian Courts Act 1828 (Imp)..... 36, 38

Australian Courts Act 1850 (Imp)..... 39

Civil Liability Act 2002 (NSW) 70

Colonial Laws Validity Act 1865 (Imp) 41, 44

Commonwealth Constitution..... 54

Commonwealth of Australia Constitution Act 1900 (Imp) 42

Copyright Act 1968 (Cth) 88, 90

Designs Act 2003 (Cth)..... 88, 89

Federal Court of Australasia Act 1976 (Cth)..... 42

Interpretation Act 1984 (WA) 36

Interpretation Act 1987 (NSW)..... 64, 65

Judicature Act 1876 (Qld) 23, 50

Judicature Act 1878 (SA)..... 23

Judicature Act 1883 (Vic)..... 24

Law Reform (Law and Equity) Act 1972 (NSW) 50

Legal Procedure Act 1903 (Tas)..... 24

Native Title Act 1993 (Cth)..... 46, 87

New South Wales Act 1787 (Imp)..... 38

Northern Territory Acceptance Act 1910 (Cth) 36

Patents Act 1990 (Cth) 88, 89

Privy Council (Appeals from the High Court) Act 1975 (Cth)..... 42

Privy Council (Limitation of Appeals) Act 1968 (Cth)..... 42

Seat of Government Acceptance Act 1909 (Cth)..... 36

Supreme Court Act (NT) 24

Supreme Court Act 1880 (WA) 23

Supreme Court Act 1933 (ACT)..... 24

Supreme Court Act 1935 (SA) 50

<i>Supreme Court Act 1935 (WA)</i>	50
<i>Supreme Court Act 1958 (Vic)</i>	50
<i>Supreme Court Act 1970 (NSW)</i>	50
<i>Supreme Court Civil Procedure Act 1932 (Tas)</i>	24, 50
<i>Trade Marks Act 1995 (Cth)</i>	88, 90

Cases

<i>Cooper v Stuart</i> (1889) 14 App Cas 286	35
<i>Cubillo v Commonwealth of Australia</i> (2001) FCA 1213	44
<i>Donoghue v Stevenson</i> [1932] AC 562	36
<i>Grey v Pearson</i> (1857) HLC 61	60
<i>Mabo v Queensland (No 2)</i> 175 CLR 1	34, 45
<i>Milirrpum v Nabalco</i> (1971) 17 FLR 141	80
<i>Phillips v Eyre</i> LR 6 QB 1	40
<i>State Government Insurance Commission v Trigwell</i> (1979) 142 CLR 617	36
<i>Telstra Corporation v Trolor</i> (2000) 102 FCR 595	49
<i>Wik Peoples v Queensland</i> (1996) 187 CLR 1	46

Sample

Topic 1: The Western Legal Tradition

Both the civil law and common law traditions are derived from ideas in Christianity and Roman Law. The common law and civil law systems are what are known as the Western legal tradition.¹

During the peak period of the Roman Empire, the Romans had a Roman Code that was derived from Greek legal principles and Christian legal principles. This code was collected together and was called the *Corpus Juris Civilis*.² The *Corpus Juris Civilis* was also known as the Justinian Texts because they were organised by Emperor Justinian. When the Roman Empire ended, most of the *Corpus Juris Civilis* was lost, and it was not until later in the 11th century that these texts were rediscovered by legal philosophers. Alongside Greek Philosophy and the Bible, the Justinian Texts formed the basis for the contemporary Western legal tradition.

While the common law and civil law systems come from the same origins, they soon developed in different directions.

1.1 COMMON LAW

Australia's legal system is based on the English common law system. Around the world, common law jurisdictions include:

- Australia;
- Canada;
- USA;
- New Zealand;
- Ireland;
- Kenya;
- India;
- Israel; and
- Malaysia.

¹ C Cook, R Creyke, R Geddes, D Hamer. *Laying Down the Law* 6th Edition. (2005) LexisNexis Butterworths. Sydney.

² C Cook, R Creyke, R Geddes, D Hamer. *Laying Down the Law* 6th Edition. (2005) LexisNexis Butterworths. Sydney.

1.2 CIVIL LAW

All the laws of civil law countries are contained in documents called “codes”. This includes both substantive and procedural law.

Civil law countries include:

- Most of continental Europe (notably France);
- Some states in South America;
- Thailand; and
- Japan.

Contemporary civil law is heavily influenced by the detailed code Napoleon drew up when he came into power after the French Revolution. This *Code Napoléon* became law in 1810 and consisted of:

- The Civil Code;
- The Code of Civil Procedure;
- The Commercial Code;
- The Code of Criminal Procedure; and
- The Penal Code.³

Sample

³ C Cook, R Creyke, R Geddes, D Hamer. *Laying Down the Law* 6th Edition. (2005) LexisNexis Butterworths. Sydney.

Topic 2: English Legal History

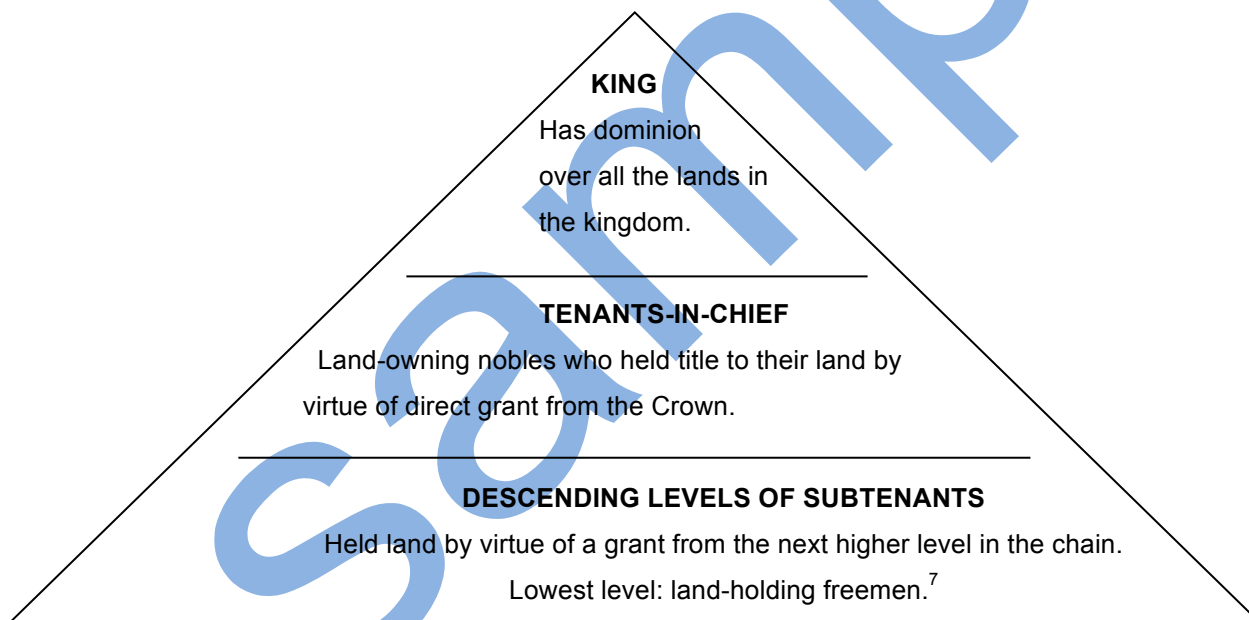
The year 1066 was a signpost for a series of cumulative changes, beginning with the conquest of England by William, the Duke of Normandy. These changes have resulted in Australia and other former British colonies sharing the common law legal tradition.⁴ Before the Norman Conquest, there was a legal system already in existence in England. The problem with this pre-Conquest legal system was that it was not consistent across regions. Pre-Conquest Anglo-Saxon laws were based on different sets of customs that were in force in different parts of England, as such there were no single set of uniform rules across the country.⁵ These laws were administered in localised Anglo-Saxon courts

2.1 FEUDALISM

The Normans established a series of land ownership called feudalism, which helped create a stable and uniform administrative system of government throughout England.

- **Feudalism:** a system of land ownership based upon a formal social hierarchy.⁶

2.1.1 The formal social hierarchy in Feudalism



⁴ C Cook, R Creyke, R Geddes, D Hamer. *Laying Down the Law* 6th Edition. (2005) LexisNexis Butterworths. Sydney.

⁵ C Cook, R Creyke, R Geddes, D Hamer. *Laying Down the Law* 6th Edition. (2005) LexisNexis Butterworths. Sydney.

⁶ C Cook, R Creyke, R Geddes, D Hamer. *Laying Down the Law* 6th Edition. (2005) LexisNexis Butterworths. Sydney.

⁷ C Cook, R Creyke, R Geddes, D Hamer. *Laying Down the Law* 6th Edition. (2005) LexisNexis Butterworths. Sydney.

This formal hierarchy meant that alongside loyalty to the king, each landholder also owed feudal loyalty.

- **Feudal loyalty:** Loyalty owed to one level upwards. Each landholder swore allegiance to their immediate superior in the chain. Swearing allegiance meant being obligated to provide the lord with a share of the crops and serving military service on the lord's behalf. The lords in turn promised to protection and assistance to their tenants.⁸

2.2 THE CREATION OF THE COMMON LAW

The old system of localised Anglo-Saxon courts was not abolished by William, but they slowly grew out of favour as the new kings asserted their overarching dominion derived from feudalism.

As part of their duties as king, the Norman kings travelled the kingdom to hold court and hear complaints from the people. The kings, instead of looking to local customs to solve the dispute, worked under the premise that they would treat like cases across the kingdom in a similar manner – thus creating the doctrine of precedent.⁹ People preferred this system because they believed that the king and his delegates would be free of local prejudice. In addition, the king's decrees had force all through England. The king's royal rulings soon built up and set the foundations for the creation of the common law.

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⁸ C Cook, R Creyke, R Geddes, D Hamer. *Laying Down the Law* 6th Edition. (2005) LexisNexis Butterworths. Sydney.

⁹ C Cook, R Creyke, R Geddes, D Hamer. *Laying Down the Law* 6th Edition. (2005) LexisNexis Butterworths. Sydney.