

National book collection seminar

AACOBS IS HOLDING two important seminars this year. One, on the development of book collections, was held on 7-8 May, the other on Australian bibliography will be held August 26-27. The first, the Seminar on National Book Collection, was held at the National Library with about 70 invited participants from all states and territories and all aspects of librarianship.

Papers by Brian Yates, Peter Dawe, Jim Dwyer, Jane La Scala, Jack Ward, Noel Stockdale and Bob Sharman and Patricia Allen traversed the perceptions the various types of library had of their roles more or less successfully.

Perhaps the main effect of these papers was to indicate the interdependence of libraries and identify very clearly the need for a realistic methodology to be developed which would permit co-operative agreements to be developed to allow greater rationalisation in collection building, preferably within a contractual context. The potential which networks like CAVAL have was pointed out. There was a proper measure of cynicism about the possibility of Commonwealth funds becoming available to assist these efforts at least in the short term.

In discussion of the role of the National Library it became clear that it was not yet in the position, even seven years after the STISEC report, where it could carry out the STI role envisaged by that report adequately despite the creation and development of ANSTEL. CSIRO faces increasing difficulties in maintaining its national role in this field but it seems that it would be at least five years before the NLA could take it over.

Pressure from some participants for the NLA to have a deliberate policy of complementing the 'core type' holdings of universities by stocking little used serials, which such institutions would find useful as the last resort copy, were vigorously resisted as being a plan to establish a 'national garbage bin'. At the same time it was pointed out that any decision to rely heavily on overseas sources such as those at Boston Spa were fraught with risk or at least had a high potential cost. Many major libraries clearly believe that failure of the NLA to undertake this last resort role is inhibiting their ability to rationalise.

While there was a report that few libraries have yet cancelled significant numbers of unique titles, comments at the seminar made it clear that the next round of cancellations

which are being planned now would be likely to make a significant variation to the 'ecology' of the national book stock.

One participant indicated that there was a real possibility that nationally significant stocks brought together accidentally from the point of view of the national resource were in danger of being dispersed equally accidentally. It is clear that a number of newer or smaller institutions are, quite properly in their terms, relying on the stocks of older and larger institutions and some trauma is likely to result from cancellation of such items because of their decline in the priorities of those bodies.

There was some disappointment in the stated role of the various state libraries who seemed with few exceptions to have any real perception of a national role but no doubt this

will be hammered out in state meetings which are likely to follow.

In a remarkable display of unanimity the follow-up of these discussions was referred to the Working Party on Information Resources which had organised the seminar. It is to produce a document quickly to go to AACOBS through its Standing Committee. It is also hoped that Regional Committees will offer advice.

It would appear that like most attempts at co-operative development nationally there is a long journey ahead. There is a clear hope, however, that in the spirit of general co-operation at a time of crisis methodologies for such co-operation will be evolved. Getting agreement on the details of co-operation may be harder.

Vivid wall posters are the highlights of an exhibition currently being held at the State Library of New South Wales. The exhibition 'The last man and the last shilling' covers Australia's involvement from the Sudan Campaign in 1885 through the Boer War up to the end of World War 1.



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