CSIRO — End of an Era?

Following substantial changes in philosophy and direction by the Commonwealth Scientific and Industrial Research Organization (CSIRO), its library and information system is to undergo the most fundamental changes in its 60-year history. These changes mark a significant break from the paradigm under which the CSIRO library system has operated since its inception.

Under the changes recommended by the management consultants Pappas, Carter, Evans and Koop (PCEK), and endorsed by CSIRO's Chief Executive Officer and the CSIRO Board, the Bureau of Information and Public Communication has been disbanded, and most of the Central Library and Information Services, including CSIRO's extensive exchange program, substantially modified. These moves reflect a general contraction of the entire Corporate Centre activities of CSIRO, with devolution of functions and activities to institutes and divisions, and the general withdrawal by CSIRO from the national role which it has played in the past 60 years, to one which is more limited and self-contained.

An Information Services Unit (ISU) has been created from diminished elements of the former Information Resources Unit (IRU), Editorial and Publishing Service, National Information Network and Film Video Centre. The Organization's Regional Information Centres which handle enquiries from the public are under review, and the CSIRO Printing Centre will be closed in mid 1988. The ISU now exists as part of the organization's central administration in the Corporate Centre's Department of Corporate Affairs. The former Chief Librarian of CSIRO, (only the third person to hold this office in the Organization's long history), Peter Dawe, has opted for early retirement which became effective in May 1988. The ISU is under the control of Assistant General Manager, Jim Lumbers, from CSIRO's Corporate Centre in Canberra.

The Library and Information Task Force established prior to the PCEK consultancy had one meeting following the PCEK review in which it examined the PCEK recommendations, particularly in the light of submissions from the CSIRO divisions on future directions for library and information services. As a result of this meeting, it is understood that some of the PCEK recommendations were modified, although the major PCEK recommendation that the process of devolution currently underway should be enhanced was endorsed, as was the principle of 'user pays'.

A further committee to review library and information services on CSIRO sites has now been established, and although the final shape of library and information services is not likely to be known until later this year, the changes most likely to interest and to affect other members of the Australian library and information community are as follows.

Reference services and document delivery

This arm of the ISU is to become cost-recoverable within 12 months. Owing to a 12-month freeze on the appointment of new staff, and because of severe staff losses already incurred, document supply to non-CSIRO libraries from CSIRO central collections, (much of it uniquely held in Australia), will almost certainly be compromised.
General inquiries from the public will not be handled but will be referred to other Australian libraries.

The VIATEL and Chemical Database services will be terminated and CSIRO scientists will be charged commercial rates for translation services provided inhouse. Meanwhile, charging and pricing policies for services supplied to all users, both CSIRO and non-CSIRO, are to be determined by the newly established committee.

Australis and CSIRO databases

Each of these services is to become cost-recoverable. Each is vulnerable because of cutbacks to the systems support provided to them. This system support is no longer an integral part of Central Information Services but has been placed with the separate Management Information Systems group.

Cataloguing

Centralised authority control is to cease and be devolved to the divisions and institutes. The ramifications of this proposal are serious in that CSIRO Library Network System (CLINES) and its on-line catalogue, which is of national importance, will become an inferior product if proper quality control of database is not maintained.

CSIRO exchange program

There has been wide-spread concern expressed by the Australian library and scientific communities at the proposed drastic reductions to CSIRO's exchange of publications program which has been built up over a period of 70 years and until comparatively recently dealt with over 7000 institutes in most countries of the world. The expected cutback to the current exchange program, which has already been subject to substantial modification in recent years, will lead to a further loss of many thousands of scientific and technical serials (many uniquely held) to the Australian library and scientific community.

The Organization's highly efficient and coordinated mailing-list program is also to be substantially modified, with the maintenance of mailing lists for divisional publications becoming the responsibility of division or institute.

Technical services

Broadly, technical services at their present diminished levels will be maintained only until CLINES becomes operational.

Film and video centre

The Centre produced over 150 films, video programs, media clips, TV magazine items and TV documentaries and 600 hours of high-quality footage available to Australian and international TV stations and documentary film producers. Several of its films have won international awards and it has successfully supplied programs like Quantum with high-quality footage.

Under the new arrangements, production of film and video by this Centre is to be substantially reduced. The Centre's principal role will now be to prepare briefs, and to negotiate and supervise contracts with external contractors. The Film and Video Centre's free lending library (based in Melbourne but with holdings in Sydney, Brisbane and Darwin) is to be closed.

Editorial and publishing unit

Editorial control of the Australian journals of scientific research and some monograph pub-

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James Bennett Library Services
Supporting Australian Industry

The Australian closed market has often met with opposition within the library field. There have been claims of poor levels of stock, slow supply due to the need to indent, and increased retail prices which many librarians find difficult to equate with the overseas price. But is this really the case?

James Bennett Library Services has been hard at work, not only closely monitoring the performance of the Australian closed market, but also dispelling some of the myths which surround it and informing libraries of the benefits of using local suppliers for their overseas purchases.

Of course, it does not automatically follow that if a publisher's agent closes the market that they automatically stock every title published by the parent company. Economics dictate otherwise and some titles are just not suited to the Australian market.

There are poor suppliers whose levels of stock are less than acceptable, but they are the minority and they are finding it increasingly difficult to hide behind the excellent performance of the majority.

Generally, a large number of Australian closed market suppliers are realising that they cannot expect Australian libraries and Australian library supply companies to support them if they are not delivering the goods. More and more we are experiencing a faster supply time from local agents which reflects healthy levels of stock and less reliance on the indenting material from overseas imprint. Healthy levels of local stock mean libraries can get their books onto the shelves a lot faster than if they ordered directly from overseas sources.

Price is another myth that has built up around the Australian closed market. Because of the instability of the Australian currency in the last few years, many overseas books have been priced out of the Australian market and consumers in Australia are just not prepared to pay the prices being set. Publishers have recently responded to this reluctance and have begun to price their major titles to the Australian market. Publishers are also negotiating with their parent companies to purchase stock at prices which will allow them to set their recommended prices at the level of the Australian market. In fact, in the course of the last six months much of the mass-market material in particular has been priced fairly competitively. In many cases it is now far cheaper for Australian libraries to purchase from the Australian closed market than from the country-of-origin suppliers.

As if prices and speed of supply are not reason enough to use the Australian closed market there is also the all important factor of supporting Australian industry. It has always been the policy of James Bennett Library Services to support the Australian closed market because in doing so Australian currency is staying in Australia and Australian companies are being given a chance to grow.

IFLA Delegates Note! The *Pattern of Library Services in Australia* is now available. Written by Past National Librarian, Harrison Bryan, it is a handy overview of the Australian library scene . . . a must to read before coming down under! Available to members of the LAA and NZLA for AUS$14 and to others for AUS$20. For delivery in 14-21 days please include $3 for SAL postage.

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lishing are to continue but in a modified form. The future of the CSIRO bookshops, originally targeted for closure, is being reassessed. As noted earlier, the associated Printing Centre is to be closed.

Central collections

Extensive collections of older and/or esoteric material (some 12 kilometres) is maintained in central stores in Melbourne. This collection is to be extensively culled and the future of the residue is uncertain.

Speaking of these changes recently, former Chief Librarian, Peter Dawe, says that CSIRO professional staff, especially those responsible for decentralised services have been shocked and dismayed by many of the decisions. The former IRU was the core operations management centre of the integrated network of CSIRO libraries. Specifically, the IRU established and maintained systems and services through which its expert staff supported divisional library operations. These were high-quality common services designed to meet CSIRO's research needs and in the most efficient and cost-effective way. The symbiotic relationship built up with care over many decades between the IRU's centralised services and Divisional libraries to provide this service is now seriously threatened.

According to Peter Dawe the implementation of these policies is as much due to politics as to economics:

'Certainly it is difficult to see that such policies will bring improved efficiencies in the provision of library services or improved service to our scientists or others -- in fact, the reverse. I hope that I am proved wrong but I am very doubtful that I will be. Furthermore, the inward-looking nature of the McKinsey [the earlier consultant review of the rest of CSIRO] and PCEK reports appear to discount the national role which CSIRO could play. With a significantly weakened core, the future of the CSIRO Library Network as we have known it and of the capacity and willingness of CSIRO to meet broader national library information needs, including support to small industrial libraries, is now open to question. I would hope that the CSIRO Library Network will be able, despite all, to retain its unified strength and continue its major role in facilitating research for Australia that it has played in the past. I am not hopeful, however, of this being achieved. When it is commonly recognised that we live in 'the information age' and when information, perhaps especially scientific and technical information, is recognised as being the engine of industrial development and economic growth, it seems astonishing that one of Australia's principal centres of scientific research should be so downgraded, especially when it was widely regarded as a national centre of excellence.'

An official statement on recent changes in centralised library and related information services within CSIRO appears on page 11 of this issue.

OASIS in information management

OASIS (Office Automation and School Information System) is the name of the new software package specified by the NSW Department of Education for school administration and library management. The contractor for the software development is Softlink Australia Pty Ltd. The system is currently being trialled in six schools and will be available to schools later in the year.

OASIS will run several modules: library management; school information; staff and student information; financial management; system maintenance; timetable management; and office automation (which will include a simple word processor with *The Macquarie Dictionary* as a spelling checker and a database).

OASIS will use the MS DOS operating system. There are two contractors for hardware. The Hyundai range of personal computers along with Novell Netware for the multi-user environment will be available from Data Peripherals, and Hypec Electronics will supply their own range of personal computers and peripheral equipment.

The library management module will have an ASCIS compatible cataloguing function and will be able to load machine readable files directly. It will improve services to users and assist staff in library management with functions including: resource selection; acquisition; accessioning; cataloguing; authority file management; online public access catalogue enquiries; circulation; serials management; stocktake and stock control; report; statistics and management information; communication to and from external databases; data conversion and transfer and system maintenance.

OASIS can operate as a single user, standalone; as a library multi-user network and as part of a total school administration network. The library does not need to be linked by cable with the school management system.

information can be transferred between systems by disk, which will reduce cabling as well as security problems.

Teacher-librarians can look forward to being able to provide a more effective service to their clients, as well as giving students direct experience with online search skills. For further information contact the School Administration Unit, NSW Department of Education, 50 Hunter Street, Sydney 2000, (02) 240 8711.

Martha Heeren
Computer Education Unit

AUTOMATION BITS

- The City of Prahran's three libraries recently went online with their first public computer system. The complete library system is linked to the main computer at the Prahran Town Hall. The new system incorporates an AWA Sequel 9062 central processing unit with 3 megabytes of memory and 520 megabytes of disc storage. The public can now use the URICA public access terminals incorporating a browsing style catalogue at the Prahran/Windsor, Toorak/South Yarra and Armadale Libraries. Later this year a Community Information software module will be operational. This will link the library service and its public access terminals with the council's community services and recreation areas and the Citizen's Advice Bureaux.

- Silver Platter's 1.4 Release software is available in Australia from ALDIS. Database-specific tutorials are now available for MEDLINE, PsycLIT and ERIC databases.

  Other features of Release 1.4 include lateral searching; scrolling in the system's index; a time-out function which defines a period of inactivity before the system performs a restart; a 'spill' device where a portion of a hard disk or RAM can be designated to temporarily store information thus improving response time; and support of Microsoft Extensions