

# Public Libraries in Australia

— perspective of the 80s

by Christine Henderson

The Australian public library system is the most important point of access to the Australian library network for individual members of the general public, yet it remains under-funded, under-recognised, and it is even accused of being under-utilised. Public libraries in Australia are facing a major crisis. It is important that their future direction be determined and that positive changes be made to ensure their survival. It is also important that their status within the profession be enhanced. They no longer are the profession's poor relations but a vital link in diminishing social injustice.

## Historical background

The landmark document for public libraries is the Committee of Inquiry into Public Libraries, also known as the Horton Report, released in May 1976. One of the major attributes of the Horton Report is its definition and consolidation of the relativity between library services. It also identified the general direction which new developments should take and was used as a guideline for planning in the seventies.

The Horton Report was to the seventies and eighties what the Munn-Pitt Report had been to the thirties in terms of the history and development of Australian public libraries. However, the impetus for federal funding was lost under the Fraser government's 'new federalism'. The Federal Government still takes no direct role in public funding.

## State developments

Just as the public library services has developed differently in each state, so has the co-ordination and co-operation between state libraries and the public library sector. For example, the Library Board of Western Australia has developed a highly centralised system to serve the State's entire population even though it was not until 1951 that the Library Board of Western Australia Act was passed. The new State Library has evolved a tremendous network linking more than 200

public libraries throughout the State. The position is different in NSW where public libraries are larger and more autonomous. As a result, the relationship between the two sectors has evolved on the basis of co-operation, with the State Library taking a leading role in development and implementation of a strategic plan. The Metropolitan Chief Librarians' Committee is strong and active, and has been involved in a co-operative venture, the Subject Specialisation Scheme, for a number of years.

The impetus for change in South Australia came from the 1978 report, entitled 'Library development in South Australia'. It was recommended that more than 99 service points be established by 1988. It was proposed that the establishment and operational costs of public libraries would be equally shared by the state government and the local councils. A second Crawford Report was published last year and is gradually being implemented. However the process of developing new services is slow due to lack of funds from both sectors.

In Victoria, the election of the Library Council of Victoria in 1965 saw the organisation of the State Library into two divisions. One was responsible for reference and research services, the other for the development of public libraries. In 1965, less than two-thirds of the population enjoyed a public library service. Now coverage is virtually complete. The State was early in understanding its need to develop regional services and a master plan 'Public library service in Victoria' was published to that effect in 1970. Co-operation between the two governing bodies was enhanced by the offer of funding support for services supplied. Funding and related issues were topics of a further series of reports and recommendations which has led to the separation of the functions of the Library Council. Public awareness is now being raised by the 'Save Our Libraries in Victoria' (SOLV) Campaign, after the funding cuts envisaged by the State Government.

Tasmania has a centralised system. Eco-

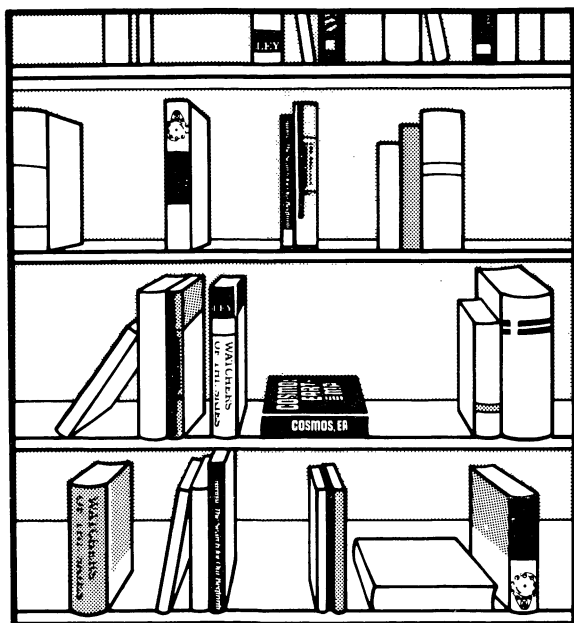
nomie statements in this State show that government is concerned about library expenditure which mirrors a general trend throughout the nation. An integrated local library system exists in the Northern Territory where the State government has taken over, except for a few councils. In the ACT, the public library system has been separated from the control of the National Library. The development of the service is documented in a report by Ted Flowers. The document is interesting in that many of the issues described are common to other services.

In Queensland, a new State Library building has been erected. A strategic plan, 'Putting the State into the State Library' is based on the expanded role of information in society. Equal access to information and library services was difficult through the centralised system so it is planned that Queensland's public libraries develop a microcomputer network to increase effectiveness. A professional librarian has been appointed by the Brisbane City Council to supervise its library service. However, the Chief Librarians' committee is having difficulties in holding regular meetings due to the great distance members have to travel.

## Funding

Throughout the years, the responsibility of library funding has shifted away from the state to local government. Since there is disparity between the type of funding statewide, it is difficult to compare like with like. However, at first glance, it looks like the local councils in the different states are bearing the costs of library services as follows: NSW, 82 percent; Victoria, 64 percent; Queensland, 64 percent; SA, 56 percent; WA, 53 percent; Tasmania, 20 percent; and NT, 5 percent. This financial year has seen further moves to reduce the level of funding and is witnessing individual, and as yet unco-ordinated, moves by councils to introduce 'user pays'. The subject is being debated and analysed in a number of forums. The issue of federal funding is

Cont'd page 8



***If you can't quite put your finger on all your library's resources . . . 3M can help you deter light-fingered "borrowers"!***

3M's range of electro-magnetic book detection systems have been proven over the last fifteen years in libraries with both large and small budgets.

*"Certainly (the system has) reduced book numbers going 'missing'. (Also) library staff able to relax more with the system providing objective security".*

*"Staff are able to get on with the business of providing top library service".*

**Sydney Adventist High School, NSW.  
Alwyn Campbell, Teacher/Librarian.**

## Security Products Division

3M Australia Pty Ltd (inc. in NSW)  
Sydney 498-9333; Canberra 47-4322; Melbourne 542-5222  
Hobart 34-3104; Adelaide 243-6111; Perth 427-1333  
Darwin 81-5645; Townsville 72-3735; Brisbane 896-1444  
Newcastle 2-5461

Cont'd from page 7

revived from time to time, as is the issue of a further review of public libraries. However up to now there is no decision relating to these issues.

**Future issues**

There are many issues which remain unresolved and some concepts about public libraries which could benefit from change. Some supporters of public library services suggest that public libraries really are resource centres but that the traditional term 'library' generates a traditional image of the services supplied.

The responsibility of library services and the development necessary to make up for lack of funds have moved, very much, to the local level. The presence of librarians at council meetings, though not always readily accepted by councillors, may help when new policies are being initiated. The library can play an important role in reinforcing contact between council and community. In Happy Valley, South Australia, an in-depth survey is being carried out to ascertain the gaps in the information service for local government officials and councillors. Database information useful to local government is being developed and strong commitment to this methodology may assist.

In addition, public libraries are looking at their usage and users in a more stimulating manner. The Chief Librarians' Association of South Australia, used a McGregor Analysis to discover more about their readership and found that the largest percentage of their users were blue-collar workers. This meant that libraries could definitely say they were not simply being used by middle class borrowers, and that their social justice potential should be further examined. There are also gradual changes in statistical analysis being developed which will stimulate discussion and show the true worth of library services.

It is also a truism that we do not give our politicians enough information about libraries

which is meaningful in the political realm. The LAA's 'Information for the Nation' campaign will help change this pattern as will ongoing analysis of the economic benefits of using library services and the inputs which contributed to that process. In addition, the question of closer integration between information services in general and libraries must be addressed sooner rather than later. The development of automation has been sporadic and this issue needs to be dealt with in a more comprehensive manner to ensure that networking can be usefully developed.

The issue of co-operation has been fairly well addressed by public libraries, and there are several major examples of well developed co-operation, such as SHORELINK, a co-operative automated network in NSW between five North Shore councils, and WESTDOC which was launched by the library of the Footscray Institute of Technology in collaboration with the municipalities in the western region of Melbourne. WESTDOC is a bibliographic database on the history and development of the western region which has currently diversified into additional services such as statistical information and includes a current information service on Telecom's Viatel Videotex system. WESTDOC has been replicated and extended at Chisholm Institute of Technology under the name SOUTH-GUIDE, and another similar project EASTDOC has been initiated in the outer eastern region. It is now time that local co-operative ventures are extended, perhaps with consideration being given to the role of the Australian Bibliographic Network (ABN) in the development of a National Bibliographic Database. Public library holdings must form part of the database and public librarians must be included in the planning process.

Interlibrary loan charges is another issue which has not yet been successfully solved. A sub-committee of the Australian Advisory Council on Bibliographic Services (AACOBS now ACLIS) was formed and further information on the impact charges will be collected. In a positive sense this may lead to further initiatives in co-operative ventures being developed.

**Clarification**

Many of the problems facing public libraries remain exactly the same as the issues canvassed by the Committee of Inquiry into Public Libraries. We still need to determine and to clarify the exact role of the public library. There is a pressing need for increased funding to develop materials, methods and staff. The relationship between state and public libraries in the struggle for funding needs to be clarified. Local government personnel, as well as council alderman, were particularly poorly serviced at the time of the Horton Report. These are the people from whom a substantial proportion of funding for public libraries is sought.

Despite the difficulties there has been much positive development of which public librarians should be proud, including a national co-operating and sharing network of public libraries throughout Australia serving 40 percent of the total population. No other service is able to make such a claim.

What is necessary is that other areas of the profession lend support to the needs of public librarians to help them not only in the struggle for equitable funding but to determine the boundaries of their role. Without them the public would suffer and equality of access would disintegrate. But the implication which I bring before you is that if they do not survive, the pressure on other libraries will be increased beyond our wildest expectations. Is this what the profession really wants?

Christine Henderson has recently been appointed University Librarian at the University of NSW. Over the last two-and-a-half years, she has been Manager, Public Libraries of the State Library Division, SA. Previous to this, she was Chief Librarian and Information Co-ordinator at Lane Cove Public Library, Sydney. Christine has also held positions at Fisher Library, University of Sydney; University of Queensland and the Chinese University of Hong Kong.



**INDUSTRIAL NEWS**

**LAA Hospital Library Standards**

The *National Minimum Standards for Hospital Libraries* which were prepared by the former Medical Libraries Section of the LAA (now the Health Libraries Section) and endorsed by General Council are now available.

The standards will assist in the evaluation of hospital library services and enable hospitals to provide greater support to their personnel.

Free copies of the standards have been distributed to groups nominated by the Health Libraries Section. Additional copies may be purchased from LAA Head Office, 376 Jones Street, Ultimo 2007. Price: \$6 LAA members; \$10 non-members; plus postage \$1.

**Industrial Forum 88**

Some 1,500 replies were received for the industrial survey circulated in *InCite* no. 7, 13 May. This response was very pleasing particu-

larly as many of those who returned the survey took the trouble to write detailed comments about particular industrial matters.

The results have pointed to a number of general industrial concerns among library staff and the program for Industrial Forum 88 is being structured around them.

Topics to be discussed at the forum will include:

- the changing industrial relations environment
- an overview of industrial matters affecting particular library sections
- the results of the survey
- the major industrial problems identified in the survey and strategies to overcome them.

Industrial Forum 88 will be held on 17-18 November 1988 at Queens College, University of Melbourne. The cost of the seminar will be \$75 and will include lunch, morning and afternoon tea on both days. Booking forms are included in this issue of *InCite*. Contact Louise Lansley, Manager, Education and Industrial Services, LAA Head Office, (02) 692 9233 or (008) 22 1481.

**National Wage Case**

The August 1988 National Wage Case has approved a three percent increase to apply no earlier than 1 September 1988 and a flat \$10 increase to apply no earlier than six months after the effective date of the first increase.

**Salary Scales**

The 1988 LAA Salary Scales are now available. Copies are free to members and \$4 for non-members. Salary Scale booklets may be obtained by phoning LAA Head Office (02) 692 9233 or by posting the coupon below to Helena Facer, LAA House, 376 Jones Street, Ultimo, NSW 2007.

Please forward \_\_\_\_\_ copies of the 1988 LAA Salary Scales.

NAME: \_\_\_\_\_

ADDRESS: \_\_\_\_\_

LAA Membership No. (if applicable): \_\_\_\_\_  
Non-members please enclose cheque/money order for \$4.