



## Tasmania under threat

After several decades of gradual development, public library services in Tasmania are confronting an uncertain future. All public library services in Tasmania are managed by the State Library of Tasmania and the quality of library services in the State are inextricably linked to the fortunes of the State Library. Shortly after the election of the new State Labor Government, the Premier announced a major re-organisation of government agencies.

The number of agencies were reduced from fifty one to a total of eighteen super agencies. A number of smaller agencies including the State Library of Tasmania, were amalgamated with the former Education Department to form a new Department of Education and the Arts. Consequently, the State Librarian lost his Head of Agency status and his direct link to the responsible Minister. Shortly after this announcement, it was also announced that the then State Librarian would not have his contract renewed.

Within the new organisational structure, the State Librarian is a third

level manager reporting to a Deputy Secretary with responsibility for the Arts, and reporting of course to the Secretary of the Department. It was also announced that, concurrent with these developments, there would be significant micro-organisational changes within the State Library of Tasmania, including the abolition of the Director, Regional Library Services position, and the creation of three Area Manager positions to replace the seven existing Regional Librarians currently deployed throughout Tasmania.

Other proposals include the absorption of the State Library's Corporate Services Division by the Education Department's Corporate Services and the transfer of the State Library's highly specialised Systems Section to Education's computer facility.

As a result of these actions and other mooted developments, the Tasmanian Branch of ALIA arranged a meeting with the Minister for Education and the Arts, the Hon. Peter Patmore, which was held on Monday, 20 February 1990. The meeting was attended by a large number of State Library staff together with members of ALIA, Tasmanian Teacher-Librarians' Association (TTLA) and members of the public with an interest in library provision in Tasmania. The attendance was a record for an ALIA meeting.

The Minister addressed the meeting for about fifteen minutes followed by a short summation by the Acting State Librarian, Bev Ewins, on the organisational changes which have taken place and on those planned for the future. This was then followed by a lengthy question and answer session

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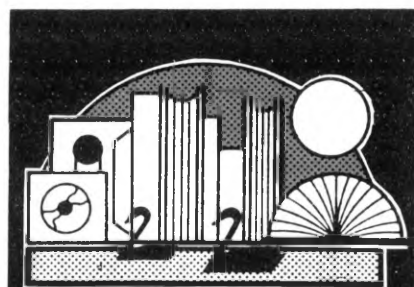
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Christine Goodacre President, Tasmanian Branch (left); Ivan Catlin, Hobart Regional Librarian; and Bev Ewins, Acting State Librarian, State Library of Tasmania.

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**A-L-I-A 1990**

**1st Biennial Conference**

**Perth - Western Australia**

**September 30-October 5, 1990**

**at the Perth Concert Hall**

 From 1 ....

between ALIA/TTLA members and the Minister.

A large range of issues was canvassed and in taking the following information on board, it should be understood that, in addition to clarification and information sharing, the meeting indulged in some kite flying which may or may not have implications for the future.

It is clear that the Tasmanian Government sees as its primary task the reduction of the level of debt servicing which currently consumes approximately 20 per cent of the State's recurrent budget. The Minister was quite honest in admitting that Treasury is now paramount in establishing Government priorities and in allocating funds to Government services. Naturally, a number of ALIA members are now wondering whether the Tasmanian Treasury is now, defacto, the Government of the day.

The Minister also made it clear that he supports the organisational restructuring taking place at the moment. He said that he supported the retention of the State Librarian's position and was unequivocal in supporting the amalgamation of Government Departments. This action is seen as a vital part of the Government's strategy to reduce the level of cost of the provision of Government services.

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**Tasmanian  
Treasury defacto  
government of  
the day**  
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The Minister advised the Branch meeting that he supported the provision of information as a vital community resource and he believes the State Library of Tasmania has an important role to execute in the community. He made some interesting comments to the effect that he doesn't believe Public Libraries should be providing 'entertainment'. Presumably, this was an allusion to the provision of fiction and various audio-visual formats and it will be interesting to see if this personal view has any policy implications down the track.

In common with most governments, there is no evidence that the Tasmanian Government has either an

information or library management policy. The Minister was asked about his Government's policy and it was evident that neither information nor library services are sufficiently critical to warrant a considered policy. In the absence of a policy, the Government commissioned an internal review of library services late last year which is yet to see the light of day. This review is awaited with considerable interest as there is much speculation that it will recommend the closure of up to forty branch libraries throughout the State, among other measures.

A number of quite specific proposals were floated including:

- joint-use school and public libraries in some Tasmanian localities.
- the amalgamation of public and school library technical functions such as acquisitions and cataloguing.
- varying library opening hours to make libraries more accessible to the public - for example, keeping them closed in the morning so they can be open at night.
- cost recovery for some services including a hire fee for the latest best sellers.

To his credit and, unusually for a politician, the Minister was extremely frank and honest in his response to ALIA members. Hard times have certainly hit the State Library of Tasmania as they have library services in other Australian States. One can only hope that there will be opportunities in the future and, that in their zeal for financial and organisational restructuring, governments do not throw the baby out with the bath water. Access to information is something many people take for granted and there is no doubt that a well funded public library network throughout Australia is the cheapest and most effective way of delivering information services to the average citizen.

*Ivan Catlin*  
Hobart Regional Librarian

**ALGL/ALIA**

**In memory of Vonnie Young**

**An award to assist in the Professional Development of a Public Librarian or Library Technician.**

Applications are invited for this once only award. The sum of \$3000 is available for a local, interstate or overseas project. This may focus on some aspect of public library services, for example, local studies, information for council and council officers, services for the disabled, young adults or any other area where in-depth investigation would be beneficial.

- Applicants must be employed in a public library in NSW and be a member of one, or both, Associations.
- Funds should be used within 2 years of the award being made.
- A detailed report of the research is to be made available to the organising Committee with a view to publication within 6 months of completion of the project.

• Applications supplying detailed description of projects to be forwarded to Diana Oliver, Sutherland Shire Council, Eton Street, Sutherland, NSW 2232, by 30 June. Please mark envelope personal.

A committee of members of the ALGL and ALIA Public Libraries Section (NSW Group) will be responsible for selecting the successful applicant.

Contact Diana Oliver, telephone (02) 521 0353 (W), (02) 660 0473 (H) for additional information.

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