

Front Line



Carol Mills
President
Riverina
Regional Group

I am a member of a small(ish) Regional Group of ALIA. We have about 100 members in various types of libraries, spread over two States. From the City of Wagga Wagga, where I am writing this, our nearest capital city neighbour is Canberra, 250 kilometres; half the distance to Sydney or Melbourne, our next nearest city neighbours. It takes 4-5 hours' fast driving to cross the Region east to west, and 3-4 hours to drive from the northern to the southern extremities.

It is the 'north-south' dialogue, in another sense, which I wish to discuss here. In some ways this differential is

more perceived than real, both by residents of the region, and by those in the capital cities, be they librarians or others. In one major sense the librarians of the RRG are of the south — a 'poverty' born of a lack of day-to-day professional contacts with a wide range of practitioners which those in capital cities take for granted (*and* of which they may not avail themselves).

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Try to imagine what some regional group members live with. The distances are great, and the opportunity to participate in Branch activities minimal. As in capital cities, not all library budgets have much in them for travel; even more serious when professional contacts are not a local call or an evening car ride away. Much as we would like the advantages of Branch status, current thinking is not in favour of 'secession' from New South Wales or Victorian

Branches, as it would not augment our diversity to any large extent. We would however like both Branches to remember that we are there, and to build bridges wherever this is possible. In some senses the advent of the fax machine has been a godsend, bringing some forms of communication closer and cheaper; but not the ordinary stimuli of dialogue and gossip.

Some librarians in regions are tied to their locality by other factors, and the limited range of employers restricts professional mobility. Regions also tend to be, for better or worse, more female in their membership. This is largely because of the 'captive wife syndrome'; women still tend to follow their spouses and then seek employment, rather than the other way around. In the regions this perpetuates the stereotype of librarianship as the female profession; most men employed in libraries in this region work in post-secondary and tertiary education libraries, and their numbers are way below the commonly accepted 30 per cent of the profession.

It is certain that a blend of administrative pragmatism and conservatism together with the application of funding standards devised

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for more closely-settled areas lead to difficulties with operation caused by poor funding; this goes with perceptions of libraries as not being as important as parks, tennis centres and the like, and is probably not helped by the lack of access to the traditional power bases in the regional community (such as the fraternity within the service clubs) which arise from being in a largely female occupation.

So much for the 'south'. When we move 'north', other factors come into play, starting with a cheaper cost of living and less noise and air pollution. In this region librarianship within itself is very strong, and was launched with a vengeance by the 1947 Riverina Library Conference. From it stemmed library education for those in the region and a professional community, which led to the formation of the RRG about 24 years ago. Our meetings are well attended, particularly when you recall that some of those present have made a 4-hour return journey on lonely roads to get there. There is enthusiasm, identity and innovation. Working over these large

distances makes librarians modest but creative. Library technology relating to communications frequently has taken off more quickly than in capital cities because it is needed.

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Library education is strong here, and a large number of Australian librarians, not only those from the region, obtained their professional qualification over the past 15 years from what is now Charles Sturt University. Most of them did this by distance education, a teaching mode in which Charles Sturt University is

particularly strong and by its enrolments a living testimonial to the needs of isolated people everywhere when seeking education.

It is this strength and enthusiasm which led me to suggest to the RRG that an ALIA conference in Albury-Wodonga was a goal worth pursuing. The Group worked at it for 4 years, even lobbying for the ALIA by-laws governing conferences to be changed so that a regional conference became 'legal'. The result is the 1992 ALIA Biennial Conference. I do hope that the committees of other regional groups are hatching invitations to ALIA for future conferences!

In relative terms the 1992 conference will be the most democratic and accessible both in cost and in distance for many members than any for many years, and until at least 1996. The nature of the Albury-Wodonga environment will make it a cohesive conference in ways not possible in a large centre. We expect registration numbers to be high; a return to the big enrolments of the 60s and early 70s. Next year we will be celebrating the 45th anniversary of the Riverina Library Conference. I hope that we can welcome *you* to Albury-Wodonga next year!

Australia Post continued from 1...

your library and your end users. The Government are expecting a community back lash — let's really give it to them!

I urge all librarians and their CLIENTS to petition Mr Brown (Minister for Australia Post) against the proposal to end the postal subsidy. I personally have contacted all State Special presidents, and indirectly through them State Branch Councils, Sue Kosse of ALIA, ACLIS, International Subscription Agency, and Qld Branch Council to rally them against this proposal. I have done my bit — now it is up to you.

ALIA National Office has already been discussing with the Australia Post account manager in Canberra the 1992 agreement for distributing *inCite*. We expect to be off the 'Registered Publications' formula and on to a new 'Print Post' formula. On our calculations there appears to be very little change in the rate that *inCite* will pay next year. However, if the expected changes in pricing structure are brought in, there will be important increases in the cost of including inserts (up to \$50 per 1000) and stricter limits on the size and weight of inserts.

The 'Print Post' rate is still based on a variety of factors: the size, weight, numbers distributed, the spread and the amount of pre-sorting before taking it to the post. The closer the publication conforms to Australia Post's new guidelines, the lower the cost. The publications hit hardest by the new rates are likely to be small

newsletters distributed in low numbers, say under 50 000 a year.

Your editor has asked Australia Post for an official statement, to give their viewpoint on these developments. The spokesperson from their Corporate Communications in Melbourne explained that much of this matter is still under discussion. The Prices Surveillance Authority has agreed to a general increase in postal rates on 1 January 1992, when the standard letter will cost 45¢ instead of 43¢. However, the PSA has warned against Australia Post using profits generated by one service to subsidise losses incurred on another. Hence, Australia Post has been asked to propose options to the Federal Government to eliminate these 'cross-subsidies'.

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The PSA would like to broaden its surveillance of other postal charges outside the area where Australia Post has a legal monopoly, i.e. services costing up to ten times the standard letter charge, currently \$4.30. This broadening is opposed by Australia Post and Minister Bob Brown.

The Industry Commission is also in the act, and will look at the efficiency of the mail, courier and parcel industry as a whole, reporting in about 12 months.

The Minister is concerned about Australia Post's 'community service obligations', and would like to see these spelt out and costed. The Shadow Minister, Warwick Smith, has recently entered the lists with a statement saying that the PSA *should* be allowed to broaden its surveillance in the public interest, as an additional pressure for postal reform.

As the Australia Post spokesperson pointed out, Australia Post is now a customer-orientated Government Business Enterprise and so is required to operate in a commercial environment. All its development options need to be competitive with courier services and other means of distributing packages.

Any changes introduced will not happen overnight. As a result of the changes most of the larger journal publishers, says Australia Post, are likely to pay *less* for distribution. Category A users will be given a year's notice of termination during 1992. If the proposals are accepted by Government, the Registered Publications scheme will cease some time in 1993.

ALIA National Office will continue to watch developments on this complicated front. It will obtain copies of the various statements and reports as they are issued, and respond on behalf of the membership. *inCite* will continue to report the news as it comes to hand.

Diana Rylatt and Peter Judge