

Front Line



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President

Lobbying is of increasing importance in maintaining and improving library and information services. As with other parts of the country Canberra has challenges to its libraries because of changes in funding. In the case of the ACT the majority of libraries are financed directly by government, whether federal or territory, and so their funding policies have an immediate and major impact on library and information services.

It is in these libraries that major changes are taking place as a result of the pressure of reduced funding. Such changes include reduction of formerly free services, integration of units e.g. combining library and registry, and devolution of activities to

other branches usually accompanied by reductions of staffing and consequent difficulty in maintaining overall services.

The ACT Branch became involved recently in the case of a Department where the library and registry were to be combined, with the displacement of a librarian and possible reduction in the availability of documents.

How do we maximise our efforts in lobbying?

The Branch President wrote to the Departmental Secretary and expressed concerns about access to records of holdings of important and unique documents and access to the documents themselves through inter library loan. He reiterated the need for a professional librarian at an appropriate level of seniority to maintain the effective operation of the library service within the cooperative network. The Department replied that the service, in regard to the documents referred, to would be maintained and that a full range of professional library services would be continued. This commitment will be followed up.


The changes in this departmental library drew some publicity in the 'Canberra Times'; the reporter has since been briefed on the situation, and we hope for a further article incorporating our view.

This briefing, compiled by one of our members, highlighted the Government's stated objective of increasing the efficiency and effectiveness of its operation and the part this library could play in this. It stressed the role of libraries in meeting the specific information needs of the public service, the contribution to other departments and organisations and the collection of material not otherwise easily available. It also stressed that with the rationalisation of collections libraries were dependent on each other, so that a reduction in one service affected all.

This local issue has led me to think again about our lobbying efforts. As an Association we are very much concerned with the service which we deliver and the resources, especially people, needed to deliver that service. In the present economic climate, appeals to efficiency and effectiveness are more likely to be useful than appeals based on the general value of libraries.

The ACT Branch has, as would be expected, involved politicians and decision makers in its activities over the years. Recently it held a successful reception for

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the federal Minister for the Arts, Tourism and Territories, the Hon David Simmons, whose portfolio includes responsibility for the National Library. This reception, which took place at ALIA House, was a very useful way to draw our concerns to his attention. It was made more effective by the presence of a number of senior bureaucrats from his Department, including the Secretary.

How do we get longer term benefit from such occasions? In the Association's draft strategic plan our efforts at lobbying were described as 'uncoordinated and reactive to crises'. Lobbying must always be able to react to particular situations but we need also to take a broader view. How could we do this?

- We need to have a consistent message, or at least a set of messages, which we can use to cumulative effect in order to achieve our goals.
- We need to take a long term view and work towards agreed goals for the Association as a whole. Our short term action, and our reaction to crises, should reflect these goals in dealing with the immediate problem.
- We need to evaluate our efforts in achieving agreed longer term goals and not just rely on the short term results.
- We have to accept that in an association such as ours many of the office holders will not be there for lengthy periods. We must develop an effective corporate memory at both the local and the national level.
- We need to further develop substantial links with other information and heritage organisations.

I was very pleased that, at the last General Council, lobbying was made a priority activity for the year. A paper from the ACT Branch, suggesting a modified structure for the strategic plan, gave examples of objectives and of indicators of performance which might be used to judge progress towards our objectives. I look forward to the next draft of the strategic plan to see how the ACT Branch can work with an overall ALIA approach. Successful lobbying must concern the Association as a whole, whether on local or national issues.

Lobbying in its various forms is of growing importance as the financial pressures mount and technological developments lead to more players in the information provision market, challenging what has been seen to be the role of libraries.

How do we maximise our efforts in lobbying? And how can we best apply the most important of the Association's resources, the knowledge, expertise and contribution of its members? In an association such as ALIA, with its diverse interests, this is a challenge which *must* be tackled.

Direct Line



As the Inquiry into Australia as an Information Society draws to a close, I am conscious of just how much information an Inquiry such as this must come to grips with. The Association has put in two National Office submissions and at least ten Division submissions to the Inquiry. After having attended two public hearings in Canberra, I am also aware of the great range and complexity of the information being put to this Inquiry.

At a special meeting of the Committee of Inquiry held at the National Library of Australia on Monday, 15 April, Warren Horton, Director-General of the National Library, Gordon Bower, Executive Officer of ACLIS, and I had the opportunity to be involved in informal discussions with the committee. These discussions focused upon the notion of an Advisory Council to government on national information policy, national coordination and cooperation and its various mechanisms, the breadth of information services and training for personnel employed in library and information agencies.

Barry Jones, Chairman of the Committee of Inquiry, indicated that he was now writing the first draft of the report, and that this draft would be discussed at a special meeting by invitation in Melbourne on Friday, 3 May.

Approximately eight representatives of the different parts of the information services industry will be invited to this meeting. ALIA and ACLIS have supported Warren Horton as the single representative of the library and information agencies sector.

Barry Jones has often stated that this report will be one of the shortest in history, with recommendations totalling no more than ten. For the library and information agencies the size of the report is not critical, but what happens after the report is; the report is expected to be tabled in Parliament in the first week of June 1991.

Minister visits ALIA House

Last week the Minister for the Arts, Tourism and Territories, David Simmonds, the junior minister to Ros Kelly, the Minister for the Arts, Sports, the Environment, Tourism and Territories, addressed a meeting of Association members of ALIA in Canberra. Also in attendance were Tony Blunn, the Department Secretary and Graham Dempster, First Assistant Secretary, Arts, Film and Cultural Heritage Division. Following a short address, the Minister met with members to as he put it 'give people the opportunity to get the ear of a politician.' This is expected to be the first of many such occasions to be organised by the ACT Branch in ALIA House, as the Association moves to increase its profile with the federal government in Canberra.

China in 1991

The Australian government has asked the National Library of Australia to lead an Australian delegation of librarians to mainland China in May 1991. The Director-General, Warren Horton, has invited John Levett, as President of the Association to join the delegation. This visit will help the Association to further cement its ties with China, building on the contacts established through previous visits and through IFLA. Other members of the delegation include Alison Crook, Leah Mann and Jan Fullerton.

BOOK RELEASE

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