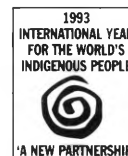


# NLA services for Aboriginal people

John Thompson tells of the new initiatives following *Federation 2001*



The International Year for the World's Indigenous People provides a stimulus for Australian libraries to look critically and constructively at their services to Aborigines. There may be a need to redress past neglect, to ensure that library collections and services satisfy agreed principles of equity and balance, and perhaps also to negotiate agreements on access to holdings, especially of unique materials such as manuscript records or photographs.

The National Library of Australia began this process of evaluation with its preparation for the conference *Towards Federation 2001: Linking Australians and their Heritage*, held at Canberra in March 1992.



Aboriginal author Sally Morgan, whose papers are held by the NLA. (Photo by Victor France, from the NLA collection)

That conference considered the restrictions on access for Australians of whatever background to their documentary and library collections and showed the need for agreements to improve the various levels of library service—nationally, at state level and locally.

Much work needs to be done in regard to the present state of commitment by Australian libraries to the needs of Aboriginal Australians. In the NLA, that commitment is implicit rather than direct. It is embodied in the Library's legislative charter 'to develop and preserve a comprehensive collection of material relating to Australia and the Australian people'. Materials dealing with Aborigines and Torres Strait Islanders are actively sought as part of the overall acquisition of Australian materials, regardless of language or script, both under legal deposit arrangements and by purchase.

In doing this, the NLA consults with its neighbour institution in Canberra, the Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders (AIATSIS), which comprehensively collects published works dealing predominantly with Aborigines and Torres Strait Islanders. The AIATSIS collection includes works published by or in the languages of these groups, original material resulting from or supporting research funded by the Institute and materials relevant to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander studies. Through this consultation, the NLA tries to ensure that the specialist responsibilities and focus of AIATSIS are recognised and acknowledged within the context of the Distributed National Collection.

Within the broad frame of its Australian responsibilities, the NLA has sought to develop a national collection which represents Australian life and achievement in all its variety. Thus, it holds the papers of such well-known Australians as Charles Perkins, H C 'Nugget' Coombs, Judith Wright, the late Kevin Gilbert and Sally Morgan. The Library's pictorial and oral history collections are a rich source for materials which constitute an important part of the documentary heritage of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.

In addition to its role as collector and custodian of key segments of the national documentary heritage, the NLA plays an important part in national leadership and coordination of a wide range of library matters, and this is reflected in the recommendations of the *Towards Federation 2001* conference. The NLA is required to develop in consultation with appropriate bodies a National Plan to provide better linkages between Australia's indigenous peoples and the total body of national documentary heritage and better access to this heritage.

These resolutions, in the context of *Towards Federation 2000*, were developed without the benefit of consultation with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities. In the further work which the NLA undertakes, to honour the spirit of the broad agreements negotiated at *Towards Federation 2001*, these resolutions must undergo a wider process of community discussion and consultation. In advancing this process, the National Library recognises that it faces a challenge to its commitment to the principles of equity and access. It looks forward to meeting that challenge. ■

## QLD Dept of Education Libs to restructure

The Department of Education of Queensland has recognised the strategic importance of its corporate (non-school) libraries by approving the policies and strategies recommended in a comprehensive report written by Jenny Cram, Manager of Library Services for the Department.

The report outlines the findings of a thorough review and analysis of the Department's corporate libraries, snapshot studies of various aspects of service, and consultation with library staff and clients.

Major recommendations from the report include:

- implementation of a non-hierarchical organisational structure dependent on a range of collaborative arrangements and on intra-organisation emphasis on the autonomy of teams and sections rather than a hierarchy of decision points;
- reduction in the number of libraries;
- incorporation of unstaffed collections into appropriate libraries;
- maintenance of the cultural integrity of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Library;
- use of conspectus methodology to focus collections in corporate libraries in relation to the individual purposes of the unit to which they are attached;
- integration of flexibility to respond to changing requirements for access to information over ownership of resources in budget allocation and control requirements;
- implementation of SDI services; and
- development and application of performance measures.

The Executive Management Committee of the Department has also endorsed library automation as a priority. ■