

The NZLIA/ALIA Joint Conference

John Levett offers some thoughts on the program (now only eight weeks away!)

The broad outline and daily detail of the program appeared as an insert in the May issue of *inCite*; it is not proposed here to reprocess that informative document, but to offer a commentary on the thinking which underlies its structure and content. I believe that this is one of the most significant conferences of the past decade, both in terms of its content and implications and because of the opportunity it offers for the sharing of experience and the pooling of viewpoints.

New Zealand is not a miniature Australia, nor can it sensibly be regarded as an Australian state manqué. Although the mere acknowledgment of differences may seem patronising to a New Zealander (and vice-versa), nothing of the sort is intended. Australians know (or think they know) about their country; they are sometimes tempted to draw simplistic conclusions about the ways in which New Zealand resembles Australia. This is neither polite, nor profitable.

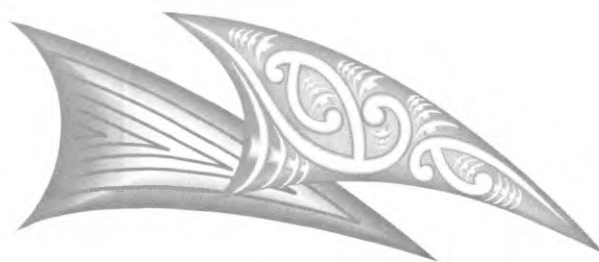
The New Zealand library scene is as rich and complex as Australia's; much can be learned from it, and there is a very great deal to admire. The Conference offers a rare opportunity to ex-

tend horizons and to share experiences and viewpoints.

In a sense, this is a three stage conference, with three days of mainline events on Tuesday, Wednesday and Thursday bracketed on Monday and Friday by highly-focused special interest activities, conceived and managed largely by SIGS from both sides of the Tasman. Carolyn Cherrett highlighted aspects of the Monday and Friday activities in the May *inCite* (pl2), this note addresses the 'core' program.

Inevitably, activities on the Friday will be coloured by what has been said and done on the previous four days, so there will be an unusual opportunity for reprise, as well as the chance to move ahead in the light of the experience of previous four days of the Conference. Although I have called the central three days the core program, the SIG activities are by no means to be regarded as fringe, for the two elements are complementary, allowing close focus on specific, and relatively narrow topics as well as wide-ranging and general discussion of global issues. The Conference planners are well-pleased with this approach, and they have every right to be.

This is very much a shared conference; New Zealand and Australian points of view, mutual and disparate experiences and indeed the occasional sharply-ground axe have all been accommodated in a conference planning process as amicable as it has been protracted. New Zealand hospitality is legendary, but less widely appreciated is the extent to which their experience of the boundaries between economics, politics and the provision of public and private library and information service can illuminate ours.



New Zealand has been another (perhaps *the* other) of the world's test-beds for what is loosely called 'economic rationalism', that contemporary cliché for any government initiative or policy which a given interest group finds inimical. Our colleagues have much to tell us about the ways in which such policies, carried to their logical conclusions, impact on our profession. The program reflects the joint concern of each country, and the felt need for wide discussion, and perhaps a stocktake of what has happened to date.

As to the social program, there are a number of misconceptions about our colleagues over there: that they don't know how to party, that their beer is weaker than ours, that they can't produce a good red, and that they all fall asleep at midnight. They think that we're all Les Pattersons, that we can't hold our grog (or theirs) that we get screaming drunk on two pots, that our reds should be carved rather than poured, that the Japanese have invented a camera with a shutter speed so fast that it can catch an Australian with his mouth closed (true), and that we can't dance.

As in all healthy prejudices, there is a grain of truth in both sets of viewpoints; but the total reality is far from the boring stereotype; come and see for yourself. And while you're at it, don't short-change yourself. New Zealand has some of the world's best skiing, superb seafood, and paradisiacal scenery. The inhabitants are friendly, gregarious, hospitable and polite. Come and try it, bring a friend. Or make one on the spot. ■

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