

Libraries working together in the Asia Pacific region

As Australia establishes its role in the Asia Pacific region a wide range of working relationships are developing between Australia and regional organisations.

Australian libraries and libraries in countries in Asia and the Pacific are entering into arrangements to share information on library management, library technologies and information resources, to provide opportunities for staff development and an understanding of international librarianship or perhaps to develop a service or product for mutual benefit, with a view to eventual commercial return.

Australian library schools through their undergraduate and diploma level courses are attracting full-fee paying students from the Asia Pacific region. In some cases our library schools are providing regular short courses and tailor-made courses in response to specific training requests from overseas clients.

ALIA, through its reconstituted International Relations Committee (IRC) and through the activities of its Asia Pacific Special Interest Group, is seeking more active relations with library associations in the region through exchange of publications and conduct of forums on library associations at conferences. The IRC is also promoting opportunities for ALIA members to be involved in international professional development activities.

Internationally, Australian librarians and colleagues in Asia and the Pacific have a network of contacts through such forums as the International Federation of Libraries and Institutions (IFLA) and within the

immediate region, through the Congress of Southeast Asian Librarians (CONSAL) and the conferences of the various regional library associations, including ALIA's various conferences.

Another Australian initiative in the region to which many of our libraries contribute on an ongoing basis is the ACPAD (Australian Centre for Publications Acquired for Development) program. This program for the past 12 years has been providing lists of quality book and journal donations from Australian libraries to targeted libraries in ASEAN countries and more recently also to libraries in Cambodia, Laos and Vietnam. The program involves over 90 Australian donors and approximately 100 recipient libraries in Southeast Asia.

At a national level, the National Library of Australia has been involved in activities in the Asia Pacific region for some years through its Regional Cooperation Program. Of particular note, however, is the NLA's move to involve an increasing number of interested Australia libraries in activities which relate to Asia. This is evident, for example, in its annual National Roundtable on Asia and the Pacific and in the national CJK initiative.

Recently the Director General's hosting of the meeting of the Council of Directors of National Libraries of Asia and Oceania in association with the State Library of Queensland's Asia Pacific library conference in Brisbane, provided many Australian librarians who attended the conference with the opportunity to develop contacts with senior col-

leagues from 21 countries in the Asia Pacific region.

A further initiative which has the potential to involve Australian libraries, library schools and librarians in activities within the Asia Pacific region is the recent agreement and commitment of funds by the National Library of Australia and IDP Education Australia for the continuation of the activities of the Australian Library and Information International Services (ALIIS). The ALIIS network includes the National Library of Australia, IDP Education Australia, ALIA, interested Australian libraries, Australian library training schools and library and information personnel.

ALIIS consists of a management committee with representation from the NLA and IDP and an advisory committee which includes, among others, the Executive Director of ALIA and the Chair of the Committee of Australian University Librarians (CAUL). A secretariat, located at IDP, acts as the point of contact.

ALIIS aims to promote the supply of Australian training and technical assistance services overseas utilising the services and expertise of the Australian library and information organisations and personnel in the ALIIS network. Through its advisory committee ALIIS is currently working on a business plan for this purpose. Of crucial importance to this is the development of satisfactory means of communication with Australian network members who are the providers of products and services.

ALIIS provides a challenging opportunity for the Australian library and information profession. I think it is fair to say that Australia is recognised in the region as a contributor of quality input to library and information related activities. The key to our development of effective equal working relationships with library and information colleagues within our immediate region is in our commitment to long-term strategies, based on cultural sensitivity and understanding, whatever the degree of 'aid' or 'trade' involved. Our success also depends on our judgement as to when it is more appropriate for institutions to cooperate and when to work independently.

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