

Vision or dreaming?

ALIA — 1997 and beyond



Kerry Smith

ALIA president-elect

I joined the Department of Information Studies at Curtin University as a lecturer in February 1991 after a ten-year stint in special libraries in the mining and petroleum industries in Perth, Western Australia. Before that my working history included office administration and a lively period as assistant cook-and-bottle-washer for the Sydney University Medical Society. I play an active role in a number of information associations, in particular ALIA and the Australia Geoscience Information Association. I am also a local government councillor.

As an academic, my research interests include science and technology information policy with my MA and further degree studies specialising in public domain access to geoscience information. I am about to commence what I hope will be a continuing series of studies on one-person libraries and librarianship in Australia. I am the new editor-in-chief of the electronic journal LIBRES.

Our Association is its membership — that is, *you and me*. It will be the way we move towards the future and the change it is offering that will govern professional perceptions as well as perceptions of the profession. The challenge for us is to move forward and be a part of the brave new world ahead of us.

At the Association level we see evidence of these changes at the coalface. Our guiding principles, as exhibited in our Statements, stand us in good stead and our perspective is often sought on government initiatives, or we comment anyway. This we do utilising the expertise of our members, our various committees and our policy setting body, your general council. The speed with which we need to offer comment is driven from outside ALIA and has often disturbed me, especially as we rarely get the time to ask what you think

on issues of importance or current moment. When we have time, the normal ALIA snail-mail circulation still stands us in good stead and information is circulated to all divisions. *inCite* and our journals also keep you up-to-date with developments. I am a member of a number of Internet discussion lists and I used to think that I might pick up some of your thoughts via these. But nay, most of you are very silent. I am pleased that we now have the facility to establish our own electronic discussion lists through ALIANet and I am hopeful that as well as the specialised lists which will emerge, we will have the ability to contact those members with an e-mail address with policy thoughts and get your feedback.

Your Association has a number of initiatives underway and the impetus for these (for example, internet access for public libraries, regulation of on-line content, continuing professional development) will continue. Yet new issues continue to emerge: our school library members are being faced with a restructuring of their role as teacher-librarians, our special librarians are often alone in the workplace and at the cutting edge of organisational change, our country may move to become a republic, the *Copyright Act* is under review.

Where is your Association in all of this? It needs to move flexibly to cope with the variety which confronts it. It is not enough to have a 'watching brief' on such issues. We must take an active stance in all areas which impinge on our future and collaborate with bodies of like mind. We rely on you to assist us. One of our strengths is in the diversity of our interests — you need only look at the number of sections and special interest groups to see this. It is so rewarding to hear from members who not only recognise a developing issue, but in the next breath tell me what they want to do about it. It is even more helpful when this offer is not one of division but of working together to help each other.

How often do I hear '*what does ALIA do for me?*' You are ALIA — and so am I. If you want — as I want — our profession to survive, contribute and thrive into the new millennium, then we must work together to achieve this. ■



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