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Propelling the Association into the 21st century...

One of the Association's most significant Annual General Meetings will be held on 17 August in Sydney. The motion being put to members is a necessary and important step in the process of moving from a Royal Charter to an incorporated association. This involves, among other things, the appointment of a liquidator.

A number of members have asked me why we require a liquidator (which is the correct legal term for this process). This is not a reflection of ALIA's financial health, which is excellent, but rather a legacy of the Royal Charter. When documents such as the Charter are written, it is good legal practice to have a means by which the legal entity (ALIA) can cease to exist. When the original Charter was written, the possibility of a transmogrification to an incorporated status was not considered. Therefore the move from incorporation under a Royal Charter to incorporation under Corporations Law entails winding up the present organisation (voluntary liquidation) before moving to a new organisational structure.

A vote for the appointment of a liquidator will allow us to take the steps towards incorporation. There are complex accounting, legal, tax and financial matters to be completed, all of which will take some time. The move to the new body is being deliberately paced following wide consultation and discussion.

Following a successful vote for the wind up of the Association at the Annual General Meeting we will need to finalise the structure of the new association (as is necessary for the articles of association under Corporations Law) and to define the new branch and divisional structure.

The structure of the new Association will need to encompass the size and composition of a board of directors, the method of electing members to this board, the responsibilities of directors, the timing of the annual general meeting, the accounting and auditing provisions, and other standard matters for articles of association. Many of these matters do not require the detail currently included

in the Association's By-Laws and Regulations and can largely (although not entirely) be altered later if necessary. Importantly, this flexibility in the articles of association will allow us to continue to review and amend our structure.

Reflecting the concerns of members of the Association, options for the divisional/branch structure are being investigated by a subcommittee of the Renewal Working Group. Helen Mandl (NSW), Jim Graham (Qld), Di Booker (SA) and Deanne Barrett (WA) are developing models to present to the Renewal Working Group this month and to the October 1999 General Council meeting for discussion.

The subcommittee will have plenty of food for thought — already a variety of viewpoints on structures have been aired by members. Some believe that a functional focus is more relevant than a geographical focus: instead of a regional digital library group, for example, the digital library section would operate at a national level for all regions. Others are firmly in favour of the existing state and territory structure (in that it has worked so far). Still others support a regional grouping which would offer a community focus (consider, for a moment, that the distance from Brisbane to Cairns is roughly the same as the distance between Melbourne and Brisbane).

There is also the question of financial support, and the working of what we currently call 'local presence' offices.

All of these questions will have to be resolved within the next twelve to eighteen months. I am confident that the structure that we develop will cater for the needs of our members, and propel the Association into the twenty-first century from a firm foundation.

In other news, my recent attendance at the American Library Association mid-summer conference resulted in a number of useful contacts, and a fascinating insight on the similarity and differences between ourselves and the 'Yanks'. I will write more about that next month. ■