

Rear vision?



One of Virginia's last official duties was to sign the submission to the Governor General requesting amendments to the Association's by-laws to increase the size of General Council

Virginia Walsh

Executive director

ALIA is an institution of which we can all be proud. Established sixty years ago by a small band of librarians

with a passionate commitment to the democratic principle of freedom to access information, our Association has continued to enunciate this proposition as the social, political, economic and technological landscape has transformed around us. During some of these evolutionary phases the pace of change has been leisurely; at other times seemingly apocalyptic. Throughout it all the focus on freedom to access information has remained the beacon which has guided the development of library education and training and the blossoming of libraries in the public and education sectors. For the corporate sector, access to timely and relevant information can underpin the economic fortunes of stakeholders and the community more generally.

Given these noble goals and the opportunities created for our libraries with the most recent wave of innovation in information and communications technologies, it is easy to understand why this field has been a consuming passion for me over the last five and a half years. As the day of my departure approaches, my efforts to relinquish the reins to others underscores the competing emotions of pleasure and pain associated with leaving these particular challenges behind.

From a management perspective ALIA is in excellent shape. We enjoy a sound financial position. We have a loyal, professional and hardworking team of employees, and financial, administrative and membership office systems which provide useful and pertinent data for responsible and informed decision-making. These provide the foundation for the services offered by the National Office. Greater effectiveness in communications with members and those we seek to influence on behalf of our members has been achieved through the creation of our web site ALIANet which supplements and enhances the more traditional paper based magazines and journals. Lobbying and promotional programs — especially the Lobby

for Libraries seminar program — have enjoyed conspicuous success. We have implemented policy and program initiatives across the spectrum of industrial relations, education and training, continuing professional development, career development for indigenous Australians — and more. Specific concerns such as internet regulation, telecommunications access for regional and remote Australians, the introduction of a goods and services tax and, more recently, the enhancement of our copyright advisory service and matters of copyright reform have been the focus of much activity.

The year ahead, 1999, will deliver major reform in our mode of governance with the move towards incorporation under the Corporations Law. A new 'shape' for our Association will be supported by new administrative arrangements designed to deliver more flexible and responsive services to members. Fundamental to the success of this new direction will be the negotiation of effective partnerships with related organisations and enhancement of the divisional structure that currently exists within ALIA. The work of our Branches, Sections and Special Interest Groups is critical to the overall success of our new Association — this is where so much of the valuable work of our organisation takes place.

Significant opportunities and threats remain for the future of the information profession. A clear identification of the outcomes which are sought will assist in ensuring a place for libraries and information centres in the so-called knowledge economy of the global digital village. And the information professional will emerge as a key player in new and unusual corporate circumstances. Our vision for the future must be informed by our previous endeavours but must clearly look forward to, embrace, and anticipate broader environmental change. With one eye on the rear vision mirror we must drive confidently forward towards hitherto unexplored and exciting destinations.

To all of you, the members of ALIA, I wish to express my gratitude for the opportunity to have worked for and with you. Your enthusiasm and commitment to your profession has been stimulating, enlightening and contagious. I came to this Association with an expectation of working with a community of thoughtful and insightful individuals and this has indeed been the case.

As I prepare to leave ALIA, packing up all my memorabilia, I am reminded of so much that has been achieved, the adventures that lie ahead and, most especially, of the wonderful special friendships that have developed over the years. Thank you. ■