

Clarion call for intellectual freedom

The recent approval of the IFLA *Statement on Libraries and Intellectual Freedom* is opportune for Australian librarians

In recent weeks we have seen a new impetus to censorship in Australia. Some Federal parliamentarians have called for the banning of the new film version of *Lolita*, already restricted to adults. There have been public demands for the police to close down David Hare's play on Oscar Wilde in Melbourne and an exhibition of photographs in Sydney. Most seriously of all, the federal government has moved to introduce internet censorship.

All strike at our right to know, our rights to freely access information and to openly express our views. They strike at the heart of librarianship, subverting the responsibility of libraries and information services to provide clients with the information they need, and to present all views without bias

and in a balanced manner. The federal government's proposal to require censorship of the internet is particularly dangerous as it erects barriers at our intellectual frontiers, filtering what Australians may see. In pandering to ultra-conservative elements in the Senate, the government is placing Australia's democracy at risk. While many of us may agree that *some* material on the internet is disgusting, we as librarians must uphold intellectual freedom, to protect democracy itself.

Who shall decide what we can see and hear? How is it that parliamentarians can see an allegedly vile movie, such as the new *Lolita*, without becoming depraved, while we, the citizens who elect them, should not be allowed to choose whether we might see it?

Who will decide what we might access on the internet? In taking care of us, will our guardians stop at sex, or extend their efforts to control all we might access?

ALIA members and all those who work in libraries and information services should join the fight to preserve intellectual freedom. The IFLA Statement, approved by the executive board on 25 March 1999, is a good place to start. Let's display it in all our organisations, promote it to our clients and stand up for the rights to access information and to express our views.

Alex Byrne, chair, Committee on Free Access to Information and Freedom of Expression, International Federation of Library Associations and Institutions

Statement on libraries and intellectual freedom

IFLA (the International Federation of Library Associations and Institutions) supports, defends and promotes intellectual freedom as defined in the United Nations Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

IFLA declares that human beings have a fundamental right to access to expressions of knowledge, creative thought and intellectual activity, and to express their views publicly.

IFLA believes that the right to know and freedom of expression are two aspects of the same principle. The right to know is a requirement for freedom of thought and conscience; freedom of thought and freedom of expression are necessary conditions for freedom of access to information.

IFLA asserts that a commitment to intellectual freedom is a core responsibility for the library and information profession.

IFLA therefore calls upon libraries and library staff to adhere to the principles of intellectual freedom, uninhibited access to information and freedom of expression and to recognise the privacy of library user.

IFLA urges its members activity to promote the acceptance and realisation of these principles. In doing so, IFLA affirms that:

- Libraries provide access to information, ideas and works of imagination. They serve as gateways to knowledge, thought and culture.
- Libraries provide essential support for life-long learning, independent decision-making and cultural development for both individuals and groups.
- Libraries contribute to the development and maintenance of intellectual freedom and help to safeguard basic democratic values and universal civil rights.

- Libraries have a responsibility both to guarantee and to facilitate access to expressions of knowledge and intellectual activity. To this end, libraries shall acquire, preserve and make available the widest variety of materials, reflecting the plurality and diversity of society.

- Libraries shall ensure that the selection and availability of library materials and services is governed by professional considerations and not by political, moral and religious views.

- Libraries shall acquire, organise and disseminate freely and oppose any form of censorship.

- Libraries shall make materials facilities and services equally accessible to all users. There shall be no discrimination due to race, creed, gender, age or for any other reason.

- Library users shall have the right to personal privacy and anonymity. Librarians and other library staff shall not disclose the identity of users or the materials they use to a third party.

- Libraries funded from public sources and to which the public have access shall uphold the principles of intellectual freedom.

- Librarians and other employees in such libraries have a duty to uphold those principles.

- Librarians and other professional libraries staff shall fulfil their responsibilities both to their employer and to their users. In cases of conflict between those responsibilities, the duty towards the user shall take precedence.

This statement was prepared by IFLA/FAIFE and approved by The Executive Board of IFLA, 25 March 1999, The Hague, Netherlands.