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History in the making?

Canberra in May and it was certainly cold. Inside, however, it was a different story. It was warm. And not just because of the good heating. The warmth was mostly that which comes from a group of people who, metaphorically speaking, get shoulder-to-shoulder to work towards a shared vision.

You have probably guessed I am referring here to the first set of formal meetings of our newly incorporated Association. To begin with, we had the first Board of Directors meeting when seven of us spent two days in discussion on how we might provide the best possible Association for current and potential members. For me there were two especially exciting outcomes from these discussions. The first was the confirmation of the general opinion that, collectively, we had voted in a very strong team from a very strong field for the first Board of Directors. There are ideas and strategies galore to fuel the planning and strategies for re-invigorating ALIA. The second great outcome was the decision that the Board of Directors would go back to the Objects of the Association and use this as the touchstone for everything we do. In other words, all of our plans and activities will be evaluated in terms of how these progress the Objects of ALIA. Essentially we are going back to basics to think through what we do, and what we might do in the future to ensure ALIA efforts are concentrated where they are most effective in advancing the Association and its membership.

Immediately following the Board of Directors meeting, we began one and a half days of the National Policy Congress (NPC) with more than sixty delegates from all over Australia [see story p26]. This was where the Board of Directors took a back seat, observing and listening to the debates and discussions. The main item on the agenda was the future structure of ALIA. Considerations of the structure were ably introduced by Helen Mandl who has provided leadership for the ALIA-wide consultations on this topic. Helen summarised the responses of members towards the various models which had been

floated, and indicated that the members were strongly in favour of change — but not radical change. The discussions around structure ranged very widely and were facilitated with great style by Ian McCallum, a former president of ALIA. The net results of these debates and the discussions on the topic of ALIA conferences and also accreditation of library services was a set of well developed NPC recommendations. These will go for consideration to the next Board of Directors' meeting in July.

It seems pretentious to say immediately after an event one has participated in that it was 'historic' but somehow that has to be said. The NPC showed itself to be an extremely effective mechanism for drawing Association leaders from a remarkable range of locations and interest areas to work together very harmoniously and effectively. It gave an opportunity for the delegates to explore ideas and articulate well-developed views to guide the Board of Directors. If anyone reading this Frontline had any doubts about the benefits of the new structure — just watch out for the report of the NPC. You will be convinced!

So with these events, ALIA has now moved from its 'interim' phase where we were in some ways marking time through the onerous incorporation process to the establishment of the new governance model and strategies for ALIA of the future. We all enter this new phase with optimism and energy and look forward to your continuing support as we continue the renewal process we started nearly two years ago in Adelaide. I will be travelling to many of the Divisions in July, as will other members of the Board of Directors, so we are looking forward to sharing the news of the ideas emerging for the future development of our Association.

To give the members a chance to get to know the individual Directors, we have decided to share this Frontline column. So next month watch out for an item by Craig Anderson.

Meanwhile, we look forward to your continuing input for our efforts on your behalf. ■