



Jennefer Nicholson

Executive director
jennefer.nicholson@alia.org.au

Brave new world

The release of the Australian Bureau of Statistics publication *Australian Social Trends 2002* has generated considerable discussion in the media. The total fertility rate has been declining since the 1960s with increasing access to oral contraceptives and more so since the 1970s

when combined with increasing labour force participation among women. Increasing proportions of women are remaining childless and couples are restricting their family size to one or two children. The median age of Australian mothers at first pregnancy has risen from 24 years in 1975 to 29 years in 2000. Malcolm Turnbull has jumped in to tell us that women should start having children and having them earlier. On the policy front the federal sex discrimination commissioner Prue Goward is pushing paid maternity leave [see Phil Teece's *Work watch*, August 2002 *inCite*].

Changes in the fertility rate result in changes in our population age structure. This has economic policy implications. Projections are that public expenditure on services for older people (health, housing and aged care, income support) will be greater than services for children (education, health).

In his presentation at the ALIA 2002 biennial conference, social researcher Hugh Mackay gives us an overview of social trends. He identifies a number of con-

traditions. At the same time as we are experiencing record levels of personal wealth at the top, we are experiencing a steady increase in the problems of poverty and homelessness. While those in the full-time workforce are working longer hours there are still around two million either unemployed or under-employed, and youth unemployment has gone back up to 25 per cent.

Australians have a sense of uncertainty and a sense of issues fatigue and disengagement from the national agenda. They are now more concerned with their own patch and personal agenda. We are, he claims 'more self-centred, less compassionate, more prejudiced and more concerned about things we can control: what video will we rent tonight? Will we put another room in the roof? Where will we go for the holidays?'

Where is this taking us? There are, Mackay believes, three emerging responses to the events of the past few years that will help to reshape Australian society over the next few years.

The first will be led by women. It is looking for ways to close the gap between the values we claim to espouse and the way we actually lead our lives.

The second is the growing voice for more rules and regulations to get back control of our patch — an interesting response within the globalisation push.

The third is the new generation who believe in keeping their options open, have become our most tribal generation, and are exploring post-material values.

And the common threads running through this for a time in which I will be ageing and smaller households increasing? We are on the threshold of a period of significant community development. We will look for connectedness in community, group and social activities. We will have a desire to 'make the community work'.

What has this got to do with ALIA and the library and information services sector? Everything. ■

Feedback to *your* Board of Directors

Do you have an idea, compliment or concern about *your* Association? Contact any director below on personal issues and ideas will be reviewed at each meeting of the Board.

E-mail to feedback@alia.org.au will be automatically forwarded to all Board members.

Joyce Kirk [*president*] phone 02 9514 1926, fax 02 9514 2711
joyce.kirk@alia.org.au

Christine Mackenzie [*vice-president*] phone 07 3403 4255, fax 07 3403 9969,
christine.mackenzie@alia.org.au

Angela Bridgland, phone 03 8344 5368, fax 03 9347 7243,
angela.bridgland@alia.org.au

Kevin Dudeney, phone 02 9804 5448, fax 02 9804 5460,
kevin.dudeney@alia.org.au

Moyra McAllister, phone 03 9679 3423, fax 03 9679 3111,
moyra.mcallister@alia.org.au

Deanne Barrett, phone 08 9268 7138, fax 08 9221 3261,
deanne.barrett@alia.org.au

Vicki McDonald, phone 07 3840 7874, fax 07 3840 7860,
vicki.mcdonald@alia.org.au