**Imogen Garner**

ALIA president
imogen.garner@alia.org.au

# ALIA e-prints: the grey REAPer

At a recent Board of Directors meeting the directors discussed the ongoing need to publish in core areas of professional practice. They expressed concern at the perceived decline in the publication of research being carried out by organisations and professionals in the library and information sector (LIS). It was felt that less research was being communicated than in the past, due — at least in part to the increasing time pressures being experienced by both practitioners and educators. Action research is not being published and valuable information is becoming increasingly unavailable to others in the profession.

As a first step in addressing this concern, the Board of Directors decided to place the topic on the agenda for the regional National Policy Congress (NPC) meetings to seek advice and ideas from members. Questions for discussion sought to identify areas of professional practice where information is lacking and approaches to address the gaps.

Although important and useful research is not being published, it does not mean that organisations have ceased to investigate problems and write about their findings. However, these documents are not normally available to other interested researchers or organisations. Nonetheless there are developments made possible by the growth and development of the internet that could help in communicating this research to the profession.

Recent trends in electronic publishing have enabled 'grey literature' to be captured, stored and communicated in a way that was not possible in the print environment.

Grey literature, which covers a range of information resources such as working papers, reports, pre-prints, conference papers, and theses that have not been commercially-published, has an important role in keeping the profession informed about informal research. It is believed that there is a large body of unpublished research material of value to LIS professionals that is difficult to identify and access. Often it is only by accident that these hidden documents are identified. How often have you been discussing a problem with a colleague only to discover that they have had the same problem, carried out research on the issue, and in many cases written up their investigation as an in-house report? Capturing this research is a priority for ALIA. *ALIA towards 2010* states that ALIA will: 'actively encourage library and information professionals to publish and share their experiences on projects in their workplaces that are designed to improve practice'. Strategies developed to make this happen include implementing the Research Exchange and Partnership Program (REAP). REAP encourages library and information professionals to publish projects using the ALIA e-print repository that records, archives and disseminates research reports.

E-print repositories or archives are being developed by many universities and professional bodies to communicate research findings online making them readily-accessible to the wider community. The value of locating research in repositories for researchers is to increase the visibility of their research findings. Material included in institutional repositories is not considered as a publication by many publishers yet provides a complement to traditional publishing.

The ALIA e-prints electronic archive is hosted by the University of Melbourne and is a freely-accessible electronic archive of research material. You will need to register to add material to the database but there is no charge for registering. Contributors are members of ALIA and participants in the ALIA REAP program. Although the aim is to provide a permanent archive of research output, papers can be removed if the author wishes to do so. So if you or your organisation have research documents such as working papers, research reports, drafts or final conference papers, or other forms of research, register using the registration page on ALIAnet [http://alia.org.au/research/] and help ALIA to bring your work to the wider professional community.                    ◼