

# Online content regulation

Two studies in 2002, ALIA's survey of internet access in public libraries (the link is given at the end of the article) and the study by Monash University's Centre for Community Networking Research of public access internet users in Victoria (<http://www.ccnr.net/project.htm#pat>) demonstrated forcefully that public libraries are major providers of internet access to Australians, and that they play a strong role in informing and educating the community about the internet. ALIA acknowledges that library and information professionals, particularly in public libraries, have to balance the standards held by their community against the professional value of freedom of access to information. (see ALIA's *Statement on professional ethics* and *Statement of freedom to read* — Part 3)

In addition to the service and technical challenges inherent in providing public access internet services, libraries operate these services within the legal framework that regulates online content. The regulation of online content was introduced in 1999 through amendments to the *Broadcasting Services Act 1992*. This legislation (BSA 1999) established a regulatory framework for the control

of material that is illegal or unsuitable for children that is published and transmitted through online services such as the internet.

The 1999 legislation established the co-regulatory scheme for online content administered by the Australian Broadcasting Authority (ABA). The main functions of the scheme are:

- investigating complaints about internet content;
- encouraging the development and registration of codes of practice for the internet industry and monitoring compliance; and
- providing advice and information to the community about internet safety issues, especially those relating to children's use of the internet.

The ABA operates a complaints scheme under which members of the public may complain about internet content which is or may be prohibited by law. Under BSA 1999, prohibited material is defined on the basis of the current National Classification Code administered by the Office of Film and Literature Classification (OFLC).

The ABA is able to direct an internet content host (ICH) to remove from their service content hosted in Australia and which is prohibited, or is likely to be prohibited. The ABA may also direct an internet service provider or internet content host to comply with industry codes of practice that have been developed by the internet industry and regulated by the ABA.

NetAlert (<http://www.netalert.net.au>) is Australia's internet safety advisory body, and was established by the federal government in 1999 to educate the community about managing access to online content. NetAlert provides free advice, information and resources targeted at families. Its new children's website *Nettysworld* (<http://www.nettysworld.com.au>) aims to teach young children the concepts of internet safety (see p14 for more information about NetAlert).

We are awaiting the report of the government's review of the online content co-regulatory scheme. In its submission to the review, ALIA concluded that the objects of BSA 1999 can be met without restricting individual users' rights of access to information. ALIA recommended that the current regulatory approach continue without change.

*The core values of ALIA and our profession of the importance of the free flow of information and our commitment to intellectual freedom, the right to read, literacy, learning, diversity and plurality are the basis for ALIA's Statement on online content regulation (<http://alia.org.au/policies/content.regulation.html>).*

*ALIA's Online Content and Regulation Reference Group was established in 2001 to advise the ALIA Board of Directors on online content issues. The reference group has developed guidelines for members on online content regulation, including an overview of the relevant legislation, and conducted the survey (referred to above) of public library institutional members about their public access internet services. The guidelines and report of the survey, together with other information on online content regulation can be found through the public access internet services pages on the ALIA website (<http://alia.org.au/advocacy/internet.access/>).*

Susan Magnay

## Call for expressions of interest

ALIA representative for ACOC

The on-going role of the Australian Committee on Cataloguing (ACOC) is to:

- study developments in national and international cataloguing rules, standards and shared cataloguing systems;
- present the Australian viewpoint to international committees and organisations and in particular to select and brief the Australian delegate to the Joint Steering Committee for the revision of AACR;
- ensure adequate consultation within Australia on such cataloguing issues; and

• enter co-operation within Australia in shared cataloguing systems with due regard to national and regional requirements.

There is a vacancy on the committee for one ALIA representative for a two-year term from the AGM in 2004. For further information about the vacancy, please contact Mary Ann Ryan, phone 02 6215 8214, or e-mail [maryann.ryan@alia.org.au](mailto:maryann.ryan@alia.org.au).

ALIA By Laws advisory group

The role of the By-laws advisory group is to review and revise on a continuing basis the by-laws of the Association to ensure clarity and internal consistency, without the intention to change the Association and its structure.

The group acts on matters referred by the ALIA Board of Directors. It may also advise the Board of Directors of elements of the Constitution and By-laws of the Australian Library and Information Association potentially requiring review.

At least two members are required on the By Laws committee. The term of appointment for two years from the 2004 AGM. Further details and information about how to nominate are available from Mary Ann Ryan, phone 02 6215 8214, or e-mail [maryann.ryan@alia.org.au](mailto:maryann.ryan@alia.org.au). ■