

WHAT WE'RE LOOKING FOR FROM THE NEXT AUSTRALIAN GOVERNMENT

At the time of writing, we don't know when the federal election will be. When you read this, maybe we will. One thing is for certain; there will be a House of Representatives election on or before 30 November 2013 – and we are ready for it.

May the most library and information-friendly party win.

When the previous Prime Minister announced the election date of 14 September, we started work on *The Library and Information Agenda*, a document which summarises how our members want the next Australian Government to engage with library and information services during its term of office.

In the run up to the federal election, we will be lobbying for *The Library and Information Agenda* – four themes and 10 items which we believe are essential for promoting literacy, enabling citizens to be well-informed, supporting socially inclusive communities and contributing to the success of Australia as a knowledge-based economy.

Theme 1: Ensuring equity of access to information and resources

1. To recognise public libraries, which are state/territory and local government funded, as a national network and a national asset that has the capacity to improve engagement with government services and policy, and requires the ongoing support and engagement of the federal government.

2. To support the reform of the Copyright Act, already in train

through the Australian Law Reform Commission, resulting in a law that better reflects fair use in the real world and in the digital environment, and protects fair use provisions vital to improve the free flow of information for research purposes. To support the amendment of the Copyright Act to extend legal deposit provisions to include published electronic materials, ensuring that the national collection remains a comprehensive source of Australian content.

3. To support the principle of open access, making research funded by government freely available to the taxpayers who paid for it.

Theme 2: Protecting and promoting Australian culture

4. To ensure that, with the global growth of electronic content, access to Australian content for Australian readers is readily available and that our own authors, writers and illustrators continue to thrive.

5. To play an active role in setting the national cultural asset digitisation agenda and to fund the digitisation of Australian content over time, in order to bring Australian history to life online; to make family history and cultural records discoverable; to preserve vital information for future generations as a safeguard against natural and manmade disasters; and to bring Australia in line with (and even ahead of) other first world nations.

Theme 3: Improving education outcomes

6. To recognise the role that teacher librarians play in helping students develop reading, information and digital literacies; in ensuring that students are safe

online, and to endorse the goal of a qualified library professional in every school.

7. To introduce a nationwide, federally-funded early literacy initiative through public libraries, extending what currently happens in some states to all states and territories, giving every Australian child a better opportunity to be school-ready.

8. To strengthen the central role libraries play in learning at all levels, preparing Australian students for the workplace and contributing to the nation's successful engagement in the global knowledge economy.

Theme 4: Enabling sound policy and decision-making

9. To call for all federal government departments to have access to library and information services run by qualified library professionals, ensuring that government policy is based on timely, comprehensive and robust evidence, and to call for public sector information to be properly collected, managed, preserved and made accessible by these library and information services.

10. To endorse the important role fulfilled by qualified library and information professionals across all three levels of government and in the private sector, connecting people with information and ideas, and preserving intellectual output for future generations.

You can find *The Library and Information Agenda* in full on our website (www.diaa.org.au/advocacy-and-campaigns/advocacy-campaigns-0/2013-elections-library-and-information-agenda). We will be sending out electronic and print copies to the candidates running in the 2013 election, as well as to the local and regional party offices.

Along with the agenda, we will be sending a list of questions which we hope politicians will take the time to answer – and, of course, we will let you know what they say. These are the questions:

1. Will you pursue the reform of the Copyright Act as a priority for the first term of the new government?
2. Will you consider introducing legislation in favour of open access for government-funded research?
3. Will you include responsibility for managing the Commonwealth Government's relationship with public libraries in a Minister's portfolio?
4. Will you renew government engagement in book industry discussions and, if negotiations with international publishers falter, will you consider government intervention to assist libraries to lend ebooks?
5. Will you develop a national policy for the digitisation of priority Australian content?
6. Will you endorse the aspirational goal of a qualified library professional in every school?
7. Will you introduce a nationwide early literacy initiative?
8. Will your Ministers insist on well-resourced library and information services run by qualified library professionals for their departments?
9. Will you endorse library and information science as a valued profession, akin to accountancy, engineering, health and other professions requiring practitioner registration?

We have reviewed the policy declarations of the major parties, and identified the key areas where we need to establish a connection with libraries. These are social justice, a vibrant economy, quality education, smart communities, independent, secure seniors, and sustainable communities.

The launch and distribution of *The Library and Information Agenda* is only one aspect of our lobbying campaign. We have been building up our contacts in Parliament House, meeting

with MPs and ministerial advisers, to ensure that our voice will be heard. We are also pleased to be working with other associations to develop a united voice for the sector, whether we are talking to the Department of Education, the Department of Industry, or the Department of Broadband, Communications and the Digital Economy.

You can help promote *The Library and Information Agenda* by securing a meeting with your MP and candidates, and using this as the basis to talk about local issues. If you would like advice and support about doing this, please contact us – advocacy@alia.org.au – and we will be pleased to assist.

We will be publishing comments we receive from political parties and individual candidates in response to *The Library and Information Agenda*, to help our members identify their best voting option – and may the most library and information-friendly party win.

Referendum 2013

When we finally get to our long-awaited election, there may be a referendum. Have you thought about how you will vote on the proposal to recognise local government in the constitution?

Local government and its funding are pivotal to hundreds of public libraries across Australia so it's something we should all be thinking about. Neither the election nor the referendum are nailed down as INCITE goes to press, so the best we can do is round up the arguments for and against for our readers.

The question is whether the people want to formally 'financially recognise local government in the constitution', as it is described on the Australian Government's website at referendum2013.gov.au. Yes or no?

In the yes corner is the Labor Party – so far – and the Australian Local Government Association (ALGA). They are supported by the Australian Greens and Barnaby Joyce, leader of The Nationals in the Senate and, for the moment at least, Shadow Minister for Local Government. ALGA President Felicity-ann Lewis has called on all political parties to support the yes vote because "the only way to protect

federal funding for community services and infrastructure is to have local government recognised in the Australian constitution".

Over in the no corner is the Leader of the Opposition, and one-time Prime Minister and foreign affairs minister Alexander Downer. They say Section 96 of our constitution currently provides the Federal Government with the ability to make grants to the States however and whenever it pleases, and has enabled successive Federal Governments to fund local government for 173 odd years. Their argument is, essentially, if it ain't broke, don't fix it.

Any reference librarian can tell us that without bipartisan support, referendums have had little chance of success in this country. We do know the yes campaign has been given \$10m to make its case and the no case only \$500 000, sparking complaints about fairness before a single campaign advertisement from anyone has even hit the airwaves. And as our daily dose of political high drama continues to unfold, even having this referendum at all has drifted from an odds-on certainty to a potential scratching.

It's easy to be distracted by all that, but the critical question remains, and should be carefully considered, by every library and information professional in any way reliant on funding from local or federal sources. Which is most of us.

VOTE YES: WWW.COUNCILREFERENDUM.COM.AU

VOTE NO: WWW.NOPOWERGRAB.COM.AU

What the Independent Expert Panel on Constitutional Recognition of Local Government says: localgovrecognition.gov.au

Report of the Joint Select Committee on Constitutional Recognition of Local Government: www.aph.gov.au/Parliamentary_Business/Committees/House_of_Representatives_Committees?url=jsclg/localgovt/finalreport.htm

