

EVERY MEMBER AN ADVOCATE



It was around this time last year that we ran our first FAIR (Freedom of Access to Information and Resources) campaign. We launched the FAIR advocacy platform (fair.alia.org.au) at ALIA Information Online in February 2015 and activated it properly in March 2015, when we partnered with Public Libraries WA and asked supporters to send an email or letter to the WA Arts Minister protesting the proposed cuts to State Library of WA funding that would have seen a significant impact on public library services in the state.

More than 400 supporters contacted the Arts Minister's office and we were able to add our voice to the media outcry. The State Library's budget was cut by 8 percent, which was still a major blow, but the feeling was it could have been even worse if the campaign had not demonstrated strong community support for continued funding of public libraries.

Our next FAIR initiative came a month later with a fundraising effort to supply books to school libraries in Vanuatu after Cyclone Pam destroyed many library collections. With support from the American Library Association, we raised some AU\$4,000 and, thanks to the generous support of suppliers, we were able to help restock the libraries with new books.

In July 2015, FAIR followers across Australia took up the challenge of Cooking for Copyright, to raise awareness of our complex and outdated copyright law and join the call for reform. The mass outcry gave us a reach of 9.9 million on social media. The story was featured on radio and TV, which gave us an audience of 22.7 million. On 23 December 2015, we were given an early Christmas present by the Department of Communications – the release of a draft bill proposing amendments to elements of the Copyright Act affecting libraries, including tackling perpetual copyright in unpublished manuscripts.

Our final activity for 2015, crossing over into 2016, was the Great School Libraries campaign. For this, we

received nearly 600 nominations from more than 200 schools – at least one in every state and territory.

During the first year of FAIR we achieved most of what we hoped for, and it has brought unexpected benefits:

- The aim was to create a greater public awareness of LIS advocacy, and FAIR has proved to be much more of a consumer brand than ALIA could ever be.
- Our target was 10,000 supporters, but the 'cooking for copyright' campaign gave us a reach in the millions, rather than the thousands. Our core supporter group comprises 2,000 subscribers to the monthly e-newsletter and 1,100 participants in our social media feed.
- We hoped to raise additional funds to support our advocacy and we received some \$6,000 – not a huge amount in the scheme of things, but a very useful sum to help us expand our campaigns.

In addition, we found that FAIR could bring together partners without there being a conflict in branding. For example, it provided a neutral platform for all the school library associations to work together on the Great School Libraries campaign, and this collegial approach helped provide a united national voice for school libraries.

It is thanks to ALIA Members that we have been able to build the FAIR platform and to run these successful advocacy campaigns. Thank you for your support so far and please continue to help us spread the word. For advocacy, as for so many other things, together we are stronger. 🙌

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