

NLA unable to buy more data bases

AUSINET UNDER THREAT?

TWO NEWS items which could be of vital importance to all types of libraries in Australia are bracketed in *For information* no264/80 (17 April 1980).

The first is an outline of ANBIBNET, a new acronym signifying 'Australian national on-line bibliographical network', the system based on the Washington Library Network which has been under evaluation at the National Library of Australia for some time.

ANBIBNET, heralded in the NLA's 29 April news release as 'a dramatic new computer-based system for making library materials accessible to users', consists of a set of computer programs giving access to:

- an online authority file;
- a capacity for bibliographic and holdings records to be input and edited;
- a capacity for catalogue cards and other processing materials to be requested;
- a capacity for bibliographic and vocabulary data bases to be searched by author, subject, series, uniform title, name and subject subdivisions, title keywords, corporate and conference names, keywords, LC card number, ISBN or ISSN;
- a capacity for the holdings file to be searched.

Sustained pressure

Pending upgrading of the NLA's computer facilities, the system will be available only in-house. To quote *For information* no256/80 (one of the flurry of information sheets to

appear this year), 'once the Library is satisfied that in-house operation of the system for cataloguing is working smoothly the next stage is expected to be a pilot study to determine the feasibility of extending the bibliographic module of other organisations'. As Dr Chandler put it in the 29 April news release, there is 'sustained pressure' to extend the system nation-wide.

There have already been feasibility studies to assess the extent to which overseas data-bases 'could be made available in a cost-effective manner in Australia. One nation-wide network - ANBIBNET - may evolve, giving nation-wide access to Australian data bases and such overseas data bases as are expedient'.

It is not clear, however, whether the potential of a system such as ANBIBNET extends far beyond copy cataloguing and location information, although even those are major achievements, if successful nationally. Indications are that the WLN software is not able to and is not intended to support searching with the degree of sophistication of, say, the AUSINET system.

Disturbing news

Also in the *For information* heralding ANBIBNET is mildly disturbing news for current AUSINET users.

AUSINET, as most readers will know, is an already-existing network giving 'nation-wide access to Australian data bases' and to a number of overseas data bases.

The NLA now announces that it is unable to continue the 'purchase of data bases specially for the network'; this means that the cost of overseas data bases would need to be met by ACI, presumably in the form of higher connect charges, or by the users on a co-operative basis, presumably in the form of a surcharge, higher connect charges or a subscription.

The alternative, of course, is to forget about AUSINET for overseas data bases supplied by the National Library and to access overseas networks via the Overseas Telecommunications Commission's MIDAS service.

This seems to be the option favoured by the National Library, which in *For information* no264/80 comments 'it is in the interests of users to increase use of MIDAS in order to further influence OTC to reduce costs'. This would be all very well if the remaining data bases on AUSINET could be self-supporting. Unfortunately this, with one or two exceptions, is not the case.

Were it not for the overseas data bases, particularly ERIC, offered by AUSINET from its inception, it is doubtful whether many of the present 60-odd users would have bought into the system in the first place.

So, far from the heady days not so long ago with the possibility of *Psychological Abstracts* and AGRICOLA being online AUSINET data bases, we now have the situation where the viability of AUSINET may be in question.

Only time will tell how AUSINET, together with its newly constituted Users Committee, will emerge. At this stage, with Australian data bases being 'young and small', it needs all the support it can get.

Let's hope that the new Director-General will see AUSINET and ANBIBNET as complementing each other, even though competing for scarce resources, and will promote both networks with equal zeal.

Perhaps at the same time he will be able to impress the CSIRO that its network CSIRONET would be enhanced by a truly interactive online bibliographical information retrieval facility, which could be accessed by AUSINET users and, when OTC's MIDAS service permits, overseas users also.

Maybe SSAL and SALSSAH can be converted into AUSINET data bases. Perhaps an online national newspaper index will become a reality.

That's what resource sharing is all about. That's what a national library and information service network is all about.

David Jones

New Director-General



MR HARRISON BRYAN, MA, FLAA, Librarian of the University of Sydney, has been appointed Director-General of the National Library of Australia. He will commence a five-year term of office in late July.

Mr Bryan is a Fellow of the Library Association of Australia, and was President of the Association in 1973 and 1974. He was a member of the Association's General Council from 1951 to 1976, and of its Board of Education from 1962 to 1972, with a term as Chairman of the Board from 1964 to 1972. Mr Bryan is Editor of the *Australian Library Journal*.

As well as his involvement with the Association, Mr Bryan has been a member of the Standing Committee of the Australian Advisory Council on Bibliographical Services since 1965, and Chairman of that Committee from 1973 to 1974 and from 1977 to 1979.



About 50 people attended the official launching of ANBIBNET at the NLA on 30 April. The Chief Computer Systems Librarian, Warwick Cathro (left foreground) explains the new system.