

Public Libraries, Funds needed urgently

MUNICIPAL LIBRARIES in Victoria need a hefty injection of funds if they are to give the public a worthwhile service.

This is obvious from the findings of a recent survey of 59 municipal library services in Victoria. The survey shows that nearly all libraries are suffering severe cuts in services and plans for development have been deferred because of lack of finance.

This sorry state of affairs is occurring at a time when the public is becoming more and more aware of the services public libraries have to offer — 1978-79 circulation figures show a nine percent increase in loans over the previous year.

To combat the lack of funds, various libraries have had to reduce staff, open the

library for shorter hours and curtail many important services.

Increases needed

One area which eats up a library's revenue is the purchase of books. Last year's book vote cannot cope with the escalating prices of books in 1980.

Children's, adult fiction and adult non-fiction books imported from England show average increases of 28.5 percent to 38 percent. Thus a library's book vote needs to be higher this year by these percentages just to retain the same buying power as in 1978-79.

According to the survey (its title by the way is *Victorian Municipal Library Finance, 1979-80* and the compiler, John Simkin is the Librarian at the City of Moorabbin Library), no public library in Victoria is even close to full development.

The survey asked each of the 59 libraries: 'Has your library had to make cuts in the present year? If so, in what areas?', and 'Has your library authority adopted plans for development of services which have had to be deferred because of lack of finance? If so, in what areas?'

19 libraries reported that they were 'holding', ie maintaining existing services but not contemplating any development. In almost all cases this was achieved by substantial rises in municipal contributions — up to 45.3 percent — and the 'holding' comment was accompanied by the prediction that this could not be maintained beyond the current year without substantial increase in the State contribution.

Two libraries reported some development in the current year but needed to increase

their municipal contributions by 23.8 percent and 85 percent respectively, to achieve it.

The remaining 38 libraries reported various cuts in services and deferment of plans. The most common area for cuts (31 libraries) was in the intake of books and other materials.

The NSW 'push'

Although we have concentrated on Victoria here, public librarians in New South Wales are making concerted efforts to increase public library funding in that state.

The LAA Public Libraries Group and the NSW Branch organised a public meeting on 21 April (see *InCite* no.3, 7 March; no.8, 16 May) when the speaker was the Premier, Neville Wran. Following this meeting, a delegation was invited to meet the Premier on 28 July.

Unfortunately, due to illness, the Premier has postponed the meeting. It now looks as if they'll get together sometime in August.

The delegation hopes to cover a number of areas, including: increases to the per capita subsidy, additional special grant funding, assistance for capital works programs, and special funding for projects in 1981 as next year is the Year of the Disabled.

New provider and users for Prestel

THE LATEST news we have on Prestel International is that the Department of Productivity will participate as the sole Australian government agency to provide, as well as use, information, and the National Library of Australia will participate as a user.

The Department of Productivity will mount several data bases ranging from ministerial statements, current economic indicators, IAC reports of overseas interest, to Australian diplomatic and commercial attaches abroad. The Department's aim is to compile facts on demand and costs.

Productivity will also investigate the service from a user's viewpoint. They will study Prestel International's other operational modes, namely: Syndicated closed user group mode — access is restricted to specified users (eg subscribers to a special service); and Private closed user group mode, in which access is restricted to the despatch and receipt of internal information.

It appears that the Department will be the only participant in the trial who will be preparing a detailed, impartial report on their experience. They expect their findings to be 'quite useful for any organisation wishing to form an objective view on the benefits and costs of wired teletext services'.

Domestic Satellite who will control it?

THE FOLLOWING statement has been prepared by Dietrich Borchardt (Chairman, Standing Committee of the Australian Advisory Council on Bibliographical Services) and Denis Richardson (President of the Library Association of Australia).

Copies of the statement have been sent to the Press Gallery, Parliament House, and to all Presidents of LAA Branches and Sections. It is published here for your attention.

We have noticed with grave concern the reported statement by the Finance Minister, Mr Robinson that 'in the interest of overall efficiency and management it will be necessary to ensure that private enterprise is involved in the ownership, control and administration of the national communications satellite'. [*Australian Financial Review*, 10 July 1980]

We consider the question of ownership and control of the proposed domestic satellite to be the most important issue in this proposal. We consider it to be a fundamental issue that, in the best interests of a democratic society, the ownership and control of a public communication channel should be totally and absolutely separated from ownership and control of the material which utilises the communication channel.

We firmly believe any proposition which would permit ownership or control of Australia's first domestic satellite to pass into private hands to be contrary to the interests of the Australian community at large. It may be argued that a satellite

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