

# OVERSEAS MEMBERS WRITE

The Executive Director, Jenny Adams, has invited members in other countries to write to *InCite* with information about what is happening in their libraries.

The first of these reports follows:

## FROM WINDOWS OVER WELLINGTON

It's good to know that what goes on in NZ is of interest across the Tasman.

I have remained a member of the LAA since my days as student at the University of NSW in 1966-67 and so my impressions of Australian libraries are in danger of appearing rather out of date. But I certainly value the contact I have on paper with the LAA.

I think it is probably fair to say that the strength and backbone of NZ librarianship is still its public libraries, serving in many cases quite small areas. In the last year or so travelling round the country I still meet people living in slightly remote rural areas who get all the serious reading they want from the CLS vans. I am sure our University libraries are very similar to their Australian counterparts, although slightly smaller, and similarly our training college libraries. However, librarians in other tertiary institutions are definitely a hardy, inventive group of special note. Unfortunately, in the last few years we have even

seen some unqualified people appointed to these positions and are relying on our Australian friends to train at least one at the Riverina College.

For the last three years I have been working as a consultant librarian, with most of my clients in Palmerston North, but some in Wellington and Auckland. Here again the contrast between the two countries is most noticeable. There are probably five of us working in this way in Wellington basically in the form of one person businesses. Our home is our office. We use office bureaux for typing and do our own paper work, and probably deal with the tax department direct. None of us has yet made our first million. I have found that not many NZ companies or organisations are yet prepared to accept that they should pay for my services or regard the sort of information provided by libraries as something they are prepared to cost. I think the private consultant here also suffers a little from the very good service provided by the National Library which people know about and of course have used free of charge. How to cope with bad debts is not a skill I was taught in either the New Zealand or Australian Library School I studied at. However, the longer I work in this field the more I am convinced that NZ as a small country must make full use of its written resources and will have to learn to accept and use people like myself who have a skill which is too costly for an organisation's full

time use but worth paying for on a short term basis.

One of the advantages of working here is the compactness of the country. At times, when I am in need of an update on what is happening in the library profession, I only need to take a slow walk along Lambton Quay and chat to each librarian I meet on my way. On the other hand when I had found a problem I haven't met before the first thing I do is come home and check through my file of *Australian Special Library News* or *Cataloging Australia*, and I watched the Professional Code of Ethics debate with interest.

The reason for my title is that my home office is at the top of a very windy hill with a beautiful view across the city to the sea. I find a view and a rugged garden compensate for the difficulties and erratic income provided by my style of employment.

Thanks for the opportunity to have my say.

Sandra Clarke  
Consultant Librarian  
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## Education for library technicians in NSW

In 1985 the NSW Library Technician Certificate Course commenced at Mr Druitt Technical College, making the fourth location for the course in NSW. A recent study into the feasibility of extending the course into country areas of NSW showed a preference for the 'face to face' course presented at local technical colleges.

The NSW Library Technician Certificate Course is currently being revised. The major change is to expand parts of the course dealing with automated library procedures.

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## FREEDOM OF INFORMATION

### Attorney-General's annual report

A great deal of information about the operation of the Commonwealth Freedom of Information Act is contained in the Attorney-General's second Annual Report, now available at AGPS Bookshops. It covers the year 1983-84, the first full year of the Act's operation. As Attorney-General Lionel Bowen states in the Report's Foreword, FOI is now firmly established as an important element of Commonwealth administration, the use of FOI has grown significantly, administration has become more open and accountable and there is no evidence that the processes of government have been adversely affected by FOI.

Use of FOI has almost doubled in comparison with the period of the first Annual Report, with 19,227 requests received. On average requests were answered in less than 30 days, almost 70% were granted in full and less than 7% were rejected in full. The report notes that the FOI Act has been particularly successful in allowing access to individuals to documents about themselves. On the other hand, access has not been sought to the same extent to policy documents, although journalists, community organisations and politicians are now beginning to use the Act. The Report includes detailed information about

- legislative changes
- use of FOI by members of the public
- exemptions and exceptions used by agencies
- Administrative Appeals Tribunal and Federal Court FOI decisions
- role of the Attorney-General's Department in administering and co-ordinating FOI
- costs, benefits and detriments of FOI
- likely trends in use of FOI.

(*Freedom of Information Act 1982: Annual Report by the Attorney-General on the Operation of the Act 1983-84*, Australian Government Publishing Service, Canberra, 1985, ISSN 0812-0142.)

### New Book on FOI

Not a book for beginners, but essential for anyone making a serious study of FOI, is Peter Bayne's recently published *Freedom of Information*. It is very comprehensive, containing chapters on:

- the concept of Freedom of Information
- duties of agencies and Ministers to publish information
- the right to access
- making a request
- exemptions
- responding to a request
- amendment of personal records
- reasons and review

While the book is mainly a legal guide to the Commonwealth Freedom of Information Act, it also contains a synopsis of the Victorian Act and a useful list of sources for study of the US FOI Act.

(*Freedom of Information: an analysis of the Freedom of Information Act 1982 (Cth) and a synopsis of the Freedom of Information Act 1982 (Vic)*, by Peter J. Bayne, Law Book Company, Sydney, 1984.)

### Rupert seminar

Rupert, the Canberra public interest group, has risen from a two-year hibernation. One of its first actions has been to hold an FOI seminar with such leading figures in the FOI world as Peter Bayne of the ANU Law School, Jack Waterford of the *Canberra Times*, Hugh Selby of the Ombudsman's Office, Tom Brennan of the Welfare Rights Centre, and John McMillan of Rupert. Together they gave an excellent overview of the scope of the Act: from the point of view of journalist and litigant, in Waterford's case, who now has made upwards of 30 appeals on FOI; from the Ombudsman's Office and welfare workers assisting applicants; and from a lawyer representing appellants.

Rupert has also recommenced publication of

its Journal, as a quarterly. Two issues so far have covered topics including legal responsibility in education, racism, protection of 'whistle-blowers', fluoride, RSI, and Vietnam Veterans. The next issue is to be about administrative law, including Freedom of Information. The cost is \$25 per year, which includes membership, from Rupert, PO Box 346, Dickson, ACT, 2602; tel (062) 49 8649.

### Predictions of increased FOI charges

At the same time that the Attorney-General's Department is engaging in a public education program on FOI, and usage of the Act is increasing, the Minister for Finance and Minister assisting the Prime Minister in Public Service Matters, Senator Walsh, was reported as saying at the 'Access to Government' Conference in Sydney on 14 March that openness in Government is maintained at considerable cost. He said 'the expense of providing services under the Freedom of Information Act is growing even faster than Commonwealth payments to the Northern Territory. Whether the Government should continue to provide a near costless (to the user) research service for journalists and retired politicians is open to doubt'. There is a clear hint here that the Government is considering increasing FOI charges, and there are already indications that remissions of charges on the grounds of personal hardship, public interest, and for personal documents, are becoming much harder to obtain.

John Cook  
Canberra  
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