the bottom line

Barry Jones gently reminded us of our lack of success in placing library issues on the political agenda. Jenny Adams and I had arranged to see the Minister for Science to determine the current state of play with National Information Policy and to seek his advice on how the LAA might maximise its contribution to the current, quiet, debate.

Just before we left his office he pointed out that he was probably the only federal parliamentarian talking to a librarian at this moment . . . this week . . . perhaps this month . . .

He compared public and political awareness of NIP with the furore caused by changes to local government boundaries. He said that if a government agency came up with proposals to cut off alsatians' tails, or to outlaw bagpipes, almost everyone affected would fire off an outraged letter.

NIP's not like that. Ours is one of few breasts in which it burns. Most people who have thought about the role of a national information plan in shifting Australia's economic base from mining and primary production to more diversified, value-added, exportable activities, agree that it is important. But *what* happens next?

And that's why Jenny and I called on the Minister. Libraries house the country's major information resource and librarians and library technicians are trained to exploit them. We argued that the infrastructure to implement a national plan is already in place and funding for the co-ordination of national library services, although modest, at least exists.

Once he realised that we had come to offer assistance and not necessarily to thump the table for more money, the Minister was most communicative and helpful.

At the recent Hobart conference the ALP adopted a slightly amended version of its current position on NIP. Now that John Brown, the Minister for Sport, Recreation and Tourism has become the Commonwealth's information guru, Barry Jones' Department of Science is putting to Cabinet a joint submission with Brown's Department, all on NIP. It is expected that the submission will be approved at least in principle and, you guessed it, subject to available funds. Funded or not, this will be a good reference point against which the LAA can elevate the issue.

In the meantime we can act on Barry Jones' suggestions:

- write to the Caucus Committee on Education, Arts, Science and Youth expressing support for NIP and offering assistance with pilot programmes.
- contact State Ministers with NIP-related responsibilities.
- write to Hawke, Keating, Button, Ryan, Uren and Walsh persuading them that NIP is alive and well, and that through the LAA implementation is both desirable and feasible. Ditto for Opposition shadows.
- contact the ACTU and AMSWU along similar lines.

Head Office and the Executive will look after these tasks, but there's something you can do to help. Soon *InCite* will contain a pro forma letter for you to sign and send to your local member. The letter will point out the importance and timeliness of a national information plan for transforming the Republic of Banana into the Republic of Plenty and the major contribution which can be made by the national library system. Please address it, sign it, and send it on its way.

NIP? Yes, Minister.

Ian McCallum
President

InCite

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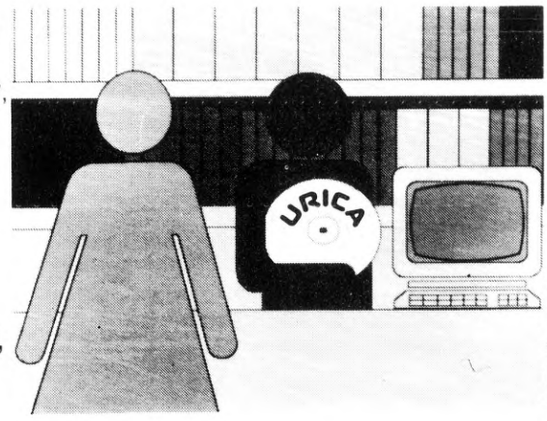

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