the front line

The New Zealand Library Association recently held its 1987 Conference 'Information Path to the Future' in Wellington, and it was my privilege and pleasure to represent our Association at that meeting. Numbers of other Australians had also journeyed across the Tasman to either participate in or attend the conference.

Given the social, political, and economic similarities between our two countries, it wasn't surprising to find the degree to which many attitudes and problems are shared.

A recurrent theme throughout the conference was the sensitive issue of 'user pays'. This principle is a major element in the New Zealand Government's strategy for economic development and reform and has a greater immediacy for our trans-Tasman colleagues than even it does for us — although, as we know, this concept is being promoted with increasing force in this country. With one exception, perhaps significantly that of a non-librarian economist, all speakers on this topic provided vigorous and often eloquent defence of the free library principle, although this was sometimes qualified by discussing charges for certain types of library service.

But as Joe Hendry, Chief Librarian, Renfrew District Library Service, Scotland told a packed audience in the first plenary session of the conference, it is *our* fault if the public majority doesn't use — and by inference, understand — our services. Only 30 percent of UK residents are registered members of public libraries. What then does the concept of free public library service mean to the remaining 70 percent? I believe the figures are similar in Australia and suspect, therefore, that the observation has equal merit.

I feel we can learn from the experience of New Zealand in this area, since they have been treading this thorny path longer than we have. I hope to address this major and important topic at greater length in a future issue of this column.

Meanwhile, I was able to share something of our experience and thinking on the restructuring and re-orientation of our Association following the Corporate Plan and Review. It is clear that this experience is of considerable interest to many NZLA members who recognise the need for a similar investigation and re-definition or re-affirmation of goals and objectives of their Association.

I shared the podium with ALA President, Regina Minudri, on another major conference topic, National Information Policy. Thanks to the work and influence of Barry Jones, the Department of Science, ALIC, AACOBS, LAA and other bodies and individuals such as Diana Killen, Warren Horton and Peter Judge (whose paper I presented in part), Australia is, I believe, considerably further advanced in this area than either the USA or New Zealand. This isn't to say that we have arrived at a coherent national information policy — far from it! As we know this is another priority issue for LAA/ALIA in 1987. It is a major agenda item for discussion at the first meeting of the Executive Committee in March.

Over 650 participants took part in a stimulating and balanced conference program (which also included talks about, and inspection of, the new National Library building to be opened to the public in May). The convenors intend to publish the proceedings: a recommended acquisition.

At the final session I was able to issue an invitation to our major LAA/IFLA 'Bicentennial' Conference. The large Kiwi contingent expected to attend will be assured of a very warm welcome to Sydney in 1988.

Peter Dawe
President

1987 DEADLINE DATES

Issue No	Closing Date	Mailing Date	Cover Date
5	Mar 17	Mar 30	Apr 3
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7	Apr 21	May 4	May 8
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10	June 2	June 15	June 19
11	June 16	June 29	July 3
12	June 30	July 13	July 17
13	July 20	Aug 3	Aug 7
14	Aug 4	Aug 17	Aug 21
15	Aug 18	Aug 31	Sep 4
16	Sep 1	Sep 14	Sep 18
17	Sep 15	Sep 28	Oct 2
18	Sep 29	Oct 12	Oct 16
19	Oct 20	Nov 2	Nov 6
20	Nov 3	Nov 16	Nov 20
21	Nov 17	Nov 30	Dec 4

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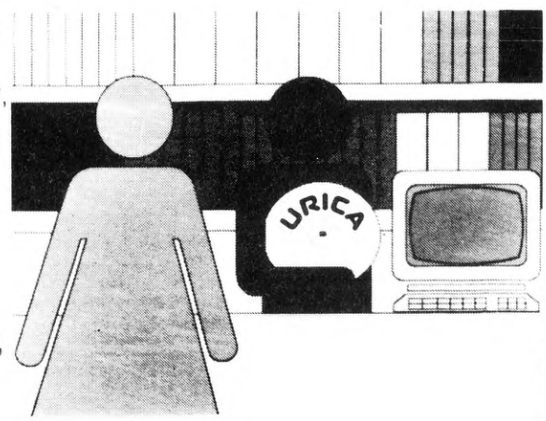

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