

Library roller hits bumpy road

A debate has broken out in the Apple Isle about the future of the Tasmanian State Library Service. The inquiry into the service has been disbanded and the Tasmanian Branch is on the alert to look out for further cuts to services and funding.

In a recent article in *The Mercury* (1 June, p4) the Tasmanian Premier, Mr Robin Gray, and the LAA's Tasmanian Branch President, Christine Frey, had a chance to air their views. According to the Tasmanian Premier the state library is a Rolls-Royce; according to Christine Frey, it's an old Holden.

Mr Gray states that the library is underused. According to ABS figures 160,000 out of 450,000 Tasmanians use the library, the majority being the aged and children. Costs average out at \$2.50 for every book borrowed. Christine Frey points out that this figure is wrong because the \$13 million bill includes the State Reference Library, the Allport Collection, and government departmental libraries, and these libraries do not 'lend' books.

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Library probe scrapped

Chairman says be ready for lending fees

by Andrew Fisher

An inquiry into the state's library system has been scrapped in the wake of the mini-budget. The inquiry was to have redefined the system's role in a deal with local government after the Legislative Council agreed to the library levy.

The chairman of the inquiry, Mr John Levett, yesterday criticised the Premier, Mr Robin Gray for implying that the only function of libraries was to lend books. He warned everyone concerned about libraries to be prepared for government proposals for lending fees or reduced services.

In the mini-budget Mr Gray said local government no longer would have to collect the levy but savings would have to be found in the library service. It cost \$2.50 to lend each book. The inquiry was set up with the co-operation of local government after the Upper House almost blocked the library levy bill last December in favour of examining the cost of the library system and finding ways to reduce costs.

The Minister for Education, Mr Peter Rae, on Monday told Mr Levett, who is the Director of the University of Tasmania's School of Librarianship, that the committee would be disbanded. 'The State Library of Tasmania ought not to be regarded as a luxury' Mr Levett said. 'It accounts for less than one percent of government expenditure a year and perhaps reaches more of the population than any other public utility. It serves people

User pays in SA

In South Australia an 'ongoing dialogue' has been occurring between LAA President, Alan Bundy, and Councillor Peter Davis of Port Lincoln.

Councillor Davis wants ratepayers to subscribe to the local library and pay \$1 per loan or \$24 per year for an annual subscription. In an article in the *Lincoln Times* Councillor Davis was reported as saying: 'If \$1 were charged for each of the 152,000 borrowings made last year, the library would almost have been self-funding. We are being selfish because by accepting Government grants we are denying some communities access to libraries — if libraries could be made self-financing, the Government would have more money available for building new libraries in these communities'.

Other reasons for wanting to introduce fees were outlined in a letter to Alan Bundy ie 'The State Government is unable to fund its share of the capital costs of the local joint library resulting in the Council being forced to service debts incurred by the State Government'.

Alan Bundy's response to this stated that public libraries are cost effective, heavily used, accessible, and contribute to individual and community social and economic development. 'What the state and national network now needs is local community leaders, with more than parochial perspectives, to stop libraries from becoming the "meat in a political and accounting sandwich" between local and state governments.'

like pensioners the disadvantaged, and those whose sole source of printed non-commercial information is the State Library Service.'

Mr Levett said the State Library Board had been emasculated and its reputation and effectiveness diminished since 1977. Members' interest in libraries was stifled. Government restrictions on providing information to advisory councils restricted initiative, killed interest and conveyed the impression that the government lacked confidence in its lay advisers.

Mr Levett said the library service was the smallest but one of the most effective government departments. Libraries represented an investment of more than \$1 billion, and opening them on Saturdays and Sundays would be a good start to ensuring that that investment was fully used.

Mr Rae said that because local government would not pay anything towards the library service there was no basis on which to continue the inquiry. Instead he would look at ways to cut the library's annual cost in talks with the State Librarian, the Tasmanian Library Advisory Board, and regional library committees.

The secretary of the Tasmanian Public Service Association, Mr Alan Evans, said the library system was coping with severe limitations on book stocks, buildings, opening hours, computer facilities, and staffing and could not be described as a Rolls-Royce service.

Meanwhile in NSW

All is not well in NSW. The NSW State Minister for Education, MD Terry Metherell, has OK'd primary school teachers to take part of their release time while their class is in the library. School librarians are reeling from the shock, just as they were about to reap the benefits of all their hard work on seminars and publications stressing the importance of co-operative planning and team teaching the clock is being wound back.

Sheila Hawkins, President, LAA School Libraries Section (NSW Group) has written to the Minister voicing the Association's concern — 'This conflicts with the practice that has developed over the last 20 years that the teacher-librarian is a professional member of the school's teaching staff. The teacher-librarian has a specialist role in the school in co-ordinating the development and implementation of information skills programs. The success of such programs is substantially based on the development of co-operative program planning and teaching which will be jeopardised if the majority of the teacher-librarian's time is spent in providing relief from face-to-face teaching. A further implication is that many schools will return to timetabled lessons with an emphasis on library skills taught in isolation from the students' classroom work. Research has indicated that this is not an effective way of developing students who are information literate and hence able to participate effectively in the workforce.'

The Summit and the LAA

The LAA has been invited to send four representatives to the Australian Libraries Summit, which is to be held in Canberra from 16-19 October.

The representatives are — Alan Bundy, Averill Edwards, John Levett and Sue Kosse. Each will be involved in the discussions on the Summit at the state level, and will then represent the LAA viewpoint at the Summit itself.

If you would like to discuss any of the issues involved in the Summit papers, please contact one of your representatives directly. Their addresses and phone numbers are:

- Alan Bundy, c/- SACAE Library, Holbrooks Road, Underdale, SA 5032 (08) 354 6260;
- Averill Edwards, c/- National Library of Australia, Canberra, ACT 2600 (062) 62 1200;
- John Levett, c/- School of Librarianship, University of Tasmania, GPO Box 252C, Hobart, Tas 7001 (002) 20 2271;
- Sue Kosse, Library Association of Australia, 376 Jones Street, Ultimo, NSW 2007 (02) 692 9233 or (008) 22 1481.

Sue Kosse
Executive Director

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