



the front line

Muddling through on facts ... a Summit issue?

For information gatherers and deliverers, libraries of most types have been remarkably inept in gathering information about themselves, their users and their non-users... and communicating that information effectively. Without this kind of information, suitably interpreted and presented, the political and funding battle is that much harder. As Des Ross, Chairman of the Libraries Board of SA, said to me recently 'Philosophy doesn't win funds - facts can'.

The ABC says it spends eight cents per Australian per day, and it is used by about 20 percent of Australians. What do public libraries spend per capita? The State Library of Tasmania, at least, has an answer - 5.6 cents per day and public libraries in that state are used by over 42 percent of the population. Tasmania, in fact, now has a better idea of its users' characteristics than most states after the Australian Bureau of Statistics Survey *Public Library Usage in Tasmania*, 1987 (see *InCite* no. 10, 24 June 1988, p. 8). Enlightening and reassuring as the Tasmanian Survey and the McGregor Survey in SA are for public libraries, they highlight the erratic, ill-co-ordinated and ill-targeted approach to evaluating what libraries achieve, and, as importantly, what they do not achieve. The

price for that approach has been paid in recent years as libraries of all types have found themselves poorly equipped to measure their performance and demonstrate convincingly their vital and cost-effective nature.

The message is not new. Voices crying in the library statistical and survey wilderness have included luminaries such as Dietrich Borchardt, Bob Sharman and Geoff Allen, as well as John Brockman and Mick Mayman among those who worked hard on this issue. It is to Geoff Allen that we owe the latest review of the situation. In 'Australian library statistics: achievements, needs and problems', (*ALJ*, May 1986) he writes:

The root of all difficulties librarians appear to have with statistical data may well be in their failure to clarify their needs before embarking upon the processes of collection and compilation ... While there is at least some basis for an assertion that statistics of some sectors of the Australian library community are among the better compilations in the entire world, this should not lead uncritically to the assumption that we really know what we are about, statistically speaking.'

Indeed it should not, as an examination sector by sector of the major groups of libraries suggests. University and most college of advanced education libraries have achieved significant progress through an annual statistical supplement to *Australian Academic and Research Libraries*, incorporated in the ANZALDATA database which is run by Curtin University of Technology.

Theological libraries record their statistics using the AARL format in an annual article in

Australasian College Libraries. Public libraries record their statistics in annual compilations by State library services. The bases for these compilations vary from state to state but they contribute to *Australian Municipal and State Libraries Statistics* compiled by the State Library Service of Western Australia. Somedata is also available from the *Directory of Australian Public Libraries* (2nd edition 1987). Of the individual state compilations that of WA is among the most instructive. For example, the 1986/87 *Statistical Bulletin for Public Libraries in Western Australia* tells us that for local authorities over 10,000 population the mean per capita loans were 7.48; per member, 17.44 and per book, 6.3. The issues per staff number average 28,339.88 and the operating cost per issue is \$1.19.

This is a good demonstration of the cost-effectiveness of the lending operations of public libraries, however more work and research is required on all aspects of library usage and non-usage. One welcomed initiative in this area are the visits by Jacqui Ecclestone, State Library of WA, to the different states to discuss statistics and moves towards national compatibility of collection and compilation.

For the largest group of libraries in Australia, the school libraries, the situation is poor. As far as I am aware (and I would be delighted to be proven wrong) only SA achieves a meaningful and public collection of school library statistics.

There are no public national statistics for TAFE libraries, apart from those supplied in the *Directory of Australian Academic Libraries*. However the situation is under

continued page 15

"Three chairs, no waiting"

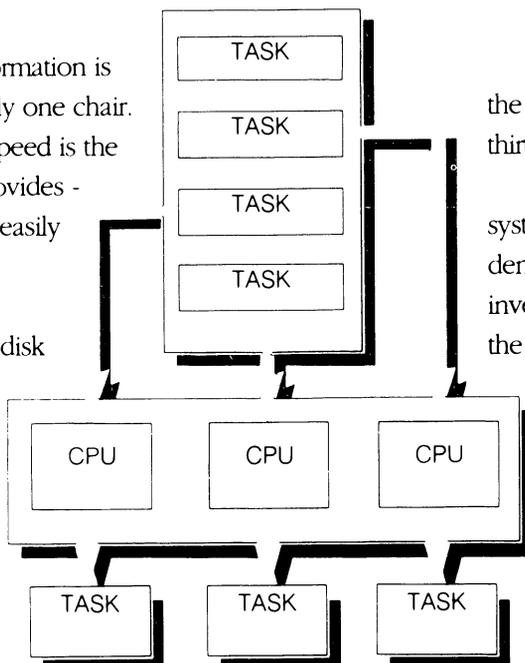
Waiting in a queue to process vital information is as outdated as a busy barber shop with only one chair.

In today's modern library, processing speed is the key. And that's what Parallel Processing provides - a quick, cost-effective system which copes easily with high-traffic demands.

What is Parallel Processing?

Using shared high-speed memory and disk storage, independent parallel CPUs simultaneously process multiple tasks - in the same time required by conventional computers for individual tasks.

With three CPUs in parallel, three different tasks can be executed simultaneously, or one complex task shared across three parallel CPUs, to achieve the end result in one third of the normal time.



And if three processors are not enough for the volume of your work, then thirteen or even thirty can be placed in parallel.

Which means that you can expand your system in easy and inexpensive stages as demand grows. No longer do you have to invest in a costly high-powered system at the outset.

And if this is not enough, Parallel

Processing computers are more reliable than expensive single processor systems. Because if one CPU fails, there's always another in parallel to take over.

Talk to CLSI about Parallel Processing.

But be warned. Once the word gets around, there might be a bit of a queue.



SUPERIOR DEDICATION

Frontline continued from page 2

review and some progress may be achieved within the next 12 months.

There are no national statistics for special libraries, that group of libraries second to school libraries numerically.

It's a motley picture if we are trying to substantiate the role of individual libraries and the whole national network of libraries. It is a critical issue, much debated in the past by AACOBS and ALIC, requiring more debate and then some ACTION. Action for which the Australian library community will have to assume responsibility if we are to achieve what Geoff Allen describes as politically necessary 'national aggregated data on library operations'.

When should the debate occur? Certainly at the summit, and possibly beyond in a special post-summit seminar. What action should occur? One suggestion is the establishment, for an initial period of three years, of an Australian Library and Information Services Survey Unit (ALISSU) attached to associations like ACLIS, LAA, NLA or a library or school of library and information studies with a demonstrable record in this area. Funding would be supplied by major organisations such as ACLIS, LAA, libraries and such grants as could be extracted, in the national interest from government or elsewhere.

ALISSU's role would include: evaluating existing sources of statistics and surveys of Australian library and information services; advising on what should be collected and analysed; measuring the contribution of Australian library and information services to the Australian economy and society; measuring the cost effectiveness of libraries; recording practical individual examples of benefits derived by library users (at the moment several agencies are collecting this but, in a discordant way); acting as a clearing house for all statistical compilations and surveys; identifying areas of research, needs for communication to schools of library and information studies; advising librarians on survey needs and techniques, a function not strongly focused on by the state library consultancy services; contracting out specific projects as appropriate

ALISSU, I speculate, would cost between \$150,000 and \$200,000 a year to do its job properly - a large amount, true, but it represents only \$15-\$20 per library service in Australia. It could be a positive action from the summit; the best possible investment in our future and the best way of asserting that libraries and information services are not soft options... by providing the hard facts.

But what do you think? Can we afford to muddle through, can we manage something better? Let *InCite*... or your merry 'summitteers' know.

Alan Bundy
President

Overseas Staff Exchanges

The following positions are available for exchange with an Australian librarian. Further information may be obtained from LIBEX, College of Librarianship Wales, Llandbadam Fawr, Aberystwth, Dyfed SY23 3AS Wales.

Library: Birmingham Public Libraries, Small Health Library, United Kingdom

Position available: Library Assistant 2

Position required: Similar in Public Library

Duration: 12 months

Library: Bodmin Public Library, Cornwall, UK

Position available: Team Librarian

Position required: Professional youth work in Public Library

Duration: 3 months

Library: Oregon City Public Library, USA

Position available: Catalogue Librarian

Position required: Similar but will consider anything

Duration: 6 months

Library: Weber State College, Gewart Library, Ogden, Utah, USA

Position available: Assistant Professor

Position required: Academic Librarian

Duration: 6 months minimum

Library: Sheffield City Polytechnic

Position available: Assistant Librarian

Position required: Assistant Librarian/ Information Officer in Academic or Special Library

Duration: 6 months — 1 year

Library: University College Library

Position available: Library Assistant, Acquisitions Department

Position required: Library Assistant (Sydney or Perth)

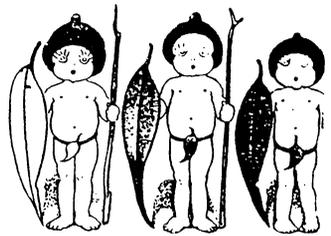
Duration: 1 year

Library: Claybury Hospital, Waltham Forest Health Authority

Position available: District Librarian

Position required: Similar in Medical, Special or Academic Library

Duration: 6 months — 1 year



HELP SAVE MAY GIBBS' HOUSE

How YOU can help!

- Write to the May Gibbs Foundation so that you can get a petition and ask all your friends to sign.
- Write to the Prime Minister and ask him to give Federal assistance to help make 'Nutcote' a working museum.
- Write to the NSW Premier, Mr Nick Greiner, stressing the importance of 'Nutcote' to the cultural life of NSW.
- Become a member of the Foundation
- Send in a tax deductible donation (\$2 and over)

Send to: The May Gibbs Foundation
C/- P.O. Box 500, Drummoyne NSW 2047

- I enclose \$50 Foundation membership fee (includes 'Nutcote News')
- I enclose \$..... for which I will receive a tax deductible receipt.

PUBLICATIONS FREE TO LIBRARIES

- Hansard NSW, V.41-V.107, 1962-1973, Bound
- Hansard Commonwealth (2 Houses combined), V.67-V.221, 1941-1953, Bound
- Hansard Senate New Series, V.2-V.52, 1953-1972, Bound; 1979-1983, Unbound
- Hansard House of Representatives, V.1-78, 1953-1972, Bound; 1978-1981, Unbound
- Index to Current Information V.3-V.13, 1975-1985, Unbound

The above offered gratis, receiving library to arrange collection. Ring: Ms E. Lesser, Chief Librarian, ACP Library (02) 282 8512.

FREE — PHOTOCARGING EQUIPMENT

Altona City Library is disposing of equipment relating to its former photocarging circulation system.

The following items are being offered:
2 Kodak Starfile RV-3 Microfilers;
1 Kodak Rollfilm Reader 322; 1 Set of transaction cards.

Also small quantity of paper, toner, replenisher and film.

Apply to: Mr Daniel Ferguson, City Librarian, Altona City Library, 123 Queen Street, Altona 3018. (03) 398 2255.

Job Position Advertisements

In the interests of bringing all relevant positions to the attention of LAA members, *InCite* accepts all employment advertisements. However, the content of these advertisements is not necessarily endorsed. Please note that the LAA contacts all employers who advertise librarian positions without specifying that library qualifications are essential to advise of the advantages of employing a qualified librarian.

The LAA's *Salary Scales* booklets are now available. Free to LAA members and \$4 to non-members.