

# Australia's future, our future - a frontline, bottomline

One of the very best things about being President of the LAA is meeting and learning from colleagues around the country through visits to State Branches and Regional Groups. During my enjoyable visit to Newcastle, the regional public librarian, Chris Williams' commented:

*We're like a sleeping giant — we, and they, don't realise our strength.*

This comment struck me initially as a mite fanciful. But is it? The library and information services industry in Australia has 14,000 outlets, it employs up to 50,000 Australians, more than 300 businesses service it. Public libraries alone are used regularly by nearly 7 million Australians and many others use school, academic and special libraries. Very few Australians will not, at some time, have used or have need of, what libraries provide.

Is the giant starting to realise its collective strength? Is it starting to stir?

Indicators, large and small, during 1988 would suggest yes, it is. We have seen or are seeing -

- the first Australian Libraries Summit;
- the establishment of the Australian Council of Library and Information Services;
- a new name, objects and direction for the LAA;
- a proposed relocation of the Association's Head Office to Canberra, and development of local presences elsewhere;
- Industrial Forum 88 — a resounding success;
- the Information for the Nation Campaign;
- a renewed emphasis on the role and potential of the public library as the primary access point to the national network of library and information services. This was demonstrated at the Summit, and is sustained by the reaction to John Levett's proposed Centre for Australian Public Library Studies.

Smaller indicators have included an invigorated *Australian Library Journal*, a new journal for public libraries; a first regular directory of Australian special, public and academic libraries; and the LAA's forthcoming encyclopaedia *ALIAS, Australia's Library Information and Archives Services*.

Add these to the challenge surmounted, of the IFLA/LAA Conference, and it's manifest that the professional mission, will, talent and cohesion to achieve a better library and information services network for Australia, is strong.

This last issue of *InCite* to bear the bicentennial symbol should not pass however without recognition that the foundations of our stirring giant owe much to senior members of the profession recently or about to retire from full-time library related employment. 1988 sees, in a sense, the end of an era. Dietrich Borchardt, Harrison Bryan, Ray Olding, Laurie Brown, Noel Stockdale, Eoin Wilkinson, Lawrie Ryan, Russell Doust, Peter Dawe, Brian Southwell in their retirement have now been joined by Jeff Scrivener, Bob Sharman, Allan Horton, Ted Flowers, John Levett and Jean Whyte. We recognise their great achievement. We know they will continue to contribute.

If the giant they made is stirring, what, as it awakes, is its agenda to be? Of 19th century Britain, John Ruskin averred:

*What do we, as a nation, care about books? How much do you think we spend altogether on libraries... as compared with what we spend on our horses?*

It is a reflection on us that in 1988 Australia still does not know how much it spends on its

libraries. It certainly spends more on horses. And we certainly resile too easily from asking for a greater proportion of this country's great wealth than the modicum libraries now receive.

The agenda must surely be to convince individual Australians, governments at all levels, the corporate sector and the union movement that our mission is Australia's mission — to provide better access to better information for a better, a more productive, a more civilised, a healthier and a more democratic Australia.

It is axiomatic that any area of collective endeavour wishing to sustain a role in the Australia of the 21st century will need:

- A mission. (*We have one*)
- A sense of collective purpose. (*We are developing one*)
- Possession of the facts. (*We possess some, but not enough of those that are meaningful*)
- An assertive workforce. (*We are not*)
- Identification and co-ordination of all its friends and allies. (*We have not*)
- Highly developed use of media. (*We have not*)
- An ability to consistently and quickly produce the 'goods'. (*We can, but too often do not*)
- A high profile in the national capital. (*We are attempting*)
- Single-minded focusing of all available human, financial and organisational resources (*We must attempt*)

The number of above aspects requiring attention implies strategic planning and identification of priorities. These will be very much at the forefront of ALIA's agenda in 1989 as our President, Averill Edwards, leads us in grappling with a strategy to help position library and information services as Australia heads towards the next century.

Hard at work on a similar strategy will be ACLIS led by its 1989 President Earle Gow.

In 1989, we will thus have ACLIS and ALIA co-operating, and doubtless from time-to-time creatively tensing, in pursuance of very similar primary objects:

ALIA - *to promote and improve the services of libraries and other information agencies;*  
 ACLIS - *to foster the development and effective utilisation of Australian libraries, information resources and services.*

There is no difference of substance in these primary objects; only a difference of the major

funding source for their achievement — the former largely personal but also institutional, the latter institutional exclusively.

The viewpoint that there is a meaningful dichotomy of concern and outcome between ALIA representing library personnel, and ACLIS representing institutions, is antediluvian. The edges are too blurred now and will become more so regardless of territorial and personal proclivities. Many librarians and libraries already ill-appreciate and are perplexed by organisations which are attempting the same ends often, with the same people, and for what is all too easily interpreted as a double cost.

The libraries of Australia must in the short term, now fund ACLIS properly if it is to achieve what the Summit has demanded of it. In the longer term, however, I suggest that ACLIS, ALIA, ASLA and the ALPC should form a Canberra-based Federation of Australian Library and Information Services Organisations if we are to maximise the capacity and goodwill of the library and information services community to influence the development of those services into the 21st century.

The close of 1990 will see nearly three years of what must be dynamic and co-operating endeavour by ALIA and ACLIS. Both organisations will be Canberra-focused. Both should then be able to commence negotiations involving the ALPC and ASLA to determine their future relationship. It is a relationship that if formalised as suggested above, would receive the overwhelming endorsement of professionals, para-professionals, libraries and lay supporters of library and information services throughout Australia.

Let us, by the year 2000 at the latest, when we speak for library and information services, do so with a strong, single, national voice — a voice that will be heard, impossible to misunderstand and impossible, at last, to ignore.

Agree, disagree? My last appeal for 1988, let *InCite* know!

My last words for 1988? Thank you for the privilege of being your President during Australia's 200th year. It has been exhausting at times, but rewarding at all times.

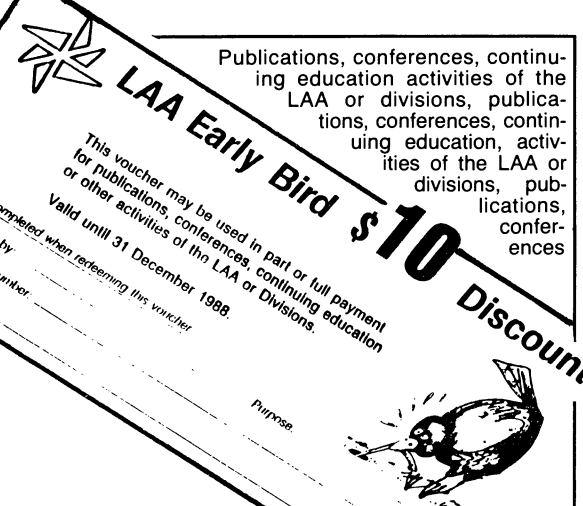
In 1988 we have helped celebrate our country's past. Now let us assert our place in Australia's future.

Alan Bundy  
LAA President

If you've got one of these →

... don't forget to use it!

(valid to 31.12.88)



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