

Reading 1990

UNESCO has declared 1990 the International Year of Literacy (IYL). This arose from worldwide concern at the low level of literacy in many countries. Australia is not immune — survey information published in 1985 by Macquarie University indicated that, for the Australian adult population, the illiteracy rate was 10.3 per cent.

Australia's main contribution to IYL will be *Reading 1990* — a campaign to celebrate and promote the joys and rewards of reading. This will complement the IYL campaign, which will focus on developing the skills of reading. *Reading 1990* was established, and an interim planning committee was formed, as a result of discussions during 1987 sponsored by the National Book Council and the Literature Board of the Australia Council. *Reading 1990* will operate under the aegis of the National Book Council Inc.

Reading 1990 will be a project of national significance involving governments, the business sector, educational institutions, libraries, literary organisations and the general community. Its brief is more than encouraging people of all ages to read more — it is concerned with raising the general literacy level of the population, which should result in more effective communicators and users of technology.

Increasing the consumption of the written word will have direct economic benefits for a wide range of industries, from paper making to publishing, book-selling and computing.

The underlying principles of *Reading 1990* are that the ability and the opportunity to read are the rights of every person, regardless of age, race, gender, disability, income and location; and that reading is of fundamental importance to the quality of life and to the economic well-being of the country.

The aims of *Reading 1990* have been defined as follows:

- to emphasise the crucial importance of reading for every individual in an increasingly complex economy.
- to increase the number of new readers in the community;
- to increase the value of reading for

education, information, leisure and pleasure;

- to encourage access to reading for all sections of Australia's multi-cultural society;
- to improve access to reading at home, at school, and in the community; and
- to demonstrate the importance of the written word in cultural expression, as well as for communication in a technological society.

Proposals for National Activities for *Reading 1990* include:

- a nationwide launch in January 1990, with posters for distribution, reading lists, and videos of writers and celebrities reading from their favourite book;
- an essay competition at various age levels on 'The Best Book I've Ever Read';
- publication of a book such as *Our world*, with poems, stories and artwork from school children across Australia;
- a 'book fair' day across Australia where books are displayed and sold and the emphasis is on book-related activities.



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