

# FRONT LINE



Peter Cohen, President, ALIA Tasmanian Branch

The earth has shaken, there has been jubilation (and public weeping), Tasmanian chickens look forward to an end to the battery system, trees celebrate. It is true — not just a change of government, but an alliance which, depending on political viewpoints, has been made either in heaven or hell. The last few months have been among the more exciting times for denizens of the Apple Isle, and some of this excitement has flowed into, or may affect, libraries.

While the Tasmanian Branch did not support any political party in the election campaign, it took the opportu-

nity to bring forward some of its concerns regarding the provision of library services within the State. The campaign enabled us to highlight the problems being experienced within the State library system, which is responsible for public libraries, in a Branch press release that made the following points:

Budget restrictions in the State Library Services in the 1980s resulted in:

- reduced hours of opening outside office hours (The State Library now opens for 2 hours on the weekend, compared with 16 hours in Sydney and Melbourne, 10.5 hours in Brisbane and 11.5 hours in Adelaide);
- a reduction in the stock of books and non-book materials available to the public in both the lending and reference service areas (The Library's ability to buy materials was cut by 40 per cent between 1983-84 and another 40 per cent between 1986 and 1987-88. Members of the community are now offered a collection that is increasingly out of date.);
- a steady decline in services in key areas such as children's services (This is a critical area of services — the recent ABS survey of the State Library Service indicated that 67.3 per cent of persons aged 12-14 years visit the library — the highest percentage in any age group.);
- the introduction of a \$1 fee for reserving a book (ALIA and many

members of the community have vigorously fought against this charge, which is an indirect charge for borrowing, and one that discriminates against those in rural areas.).

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It is always pleasing when library service is duly acknowledged, and a library received a letter of thanks from Government House 'for the assistance and support you provided in relation to the difficult Constitutional decisions which the Governor faced. Your help in locating documents and texts ... was a great help in resolving the situation and is greatly appreciated'.

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The new government is expected to be more interested in library services than the old. A great deal of work was done over the past 2 years to help the political parties write and adopt forward-looking library policies, as part of the Branch's lobbying activities. We found that the most fertile ground in this regard was with the independent members of Parliament (Bob Brown and Gerry Bates have been heavy users of library services). In their Accord with the Labor Party, the 'Greens' have placed the introduction of 'Freedom of Information' legislation as the second item for action. They have also made a commitment to establish a research unit for

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 Frontline - from 2 ••

Parliament and to generally improve access to information in the public service. The Labor Party was also quite positive, and since the election we have been to see the new Minister and have some grounds for hope that a program for the development of the State Library Service will be initiated.

However, there has been one loss for library services with the new government: the State Librarian was one of the fifty-one-odd (or should I have said about fifty-one) heads of departments or statutory authorities who were directly responsible to Ministers. In the reorganisation of the public service, this number has been greatly reduced to eighteen. The State Library is now part of the Department of Education and the Arts, and the State Librarian's access to the Minister will be via the Departmental Secretary and a new Deputy Secretary (Culture and the Arts).

The Tasmanian Branch is mounting its usual program of activities, and aims to organise a Branch function each month. Speakers this year have included Eric Wainwright (Board of Education), Warwick Cathro (ABN, and resource-sharing seminar arranged in conjunction with ACLIS), Jean Furze (Blackwell's Periodicals) and Joan Staples (librarian and Campaign Organiser for the Green Independents).

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As the dust settles after the elections, Tasmanians spend their time speculating on how long the Accord will last (the old question 'Will you still love me in the morning?') and whether various election promises will be kept (the political version of 'The cheque is in the mail').

Peter Cohen  
President


 Regional Group meets challenge - from 1 ••

Alderman Joy Cooper (Townsville/Thuringowa Joint Library Board Chairman) attended the opening. We invited Councillor John Trace of Burdekin Shire, Chairman of the State Library Board, to perform two duties — the opening, and the presentation of the Public Library LIBROS Awards, this year won jointly by Logan City and Redcliffe City. The mayors of the two cities accepted the Awards.

Logan City Library's mascot, Wordsley — who was central to their prize winning promotion entry — was a great hit in his bear suit.

We issued a press release and the local paper published a photo and short article.

The exercise was interesting in many ways. It demonstrated that Local Government in Queensland is not fully aware of services available to it through either local, State or special libraries. Naturally ORACLE, the State Library's on-line information database, was popular, and the presence of State Library personnel gave many delegates the opportunity to discuss specific concerns, as well as see the databases in action.

As a further encouragement to delegates to have a better look at library services, we held a small competition offering two prizes donated by a local book shop and the Thuringowa Library Social Club.

From the very beginning, this was a venture of faith. We had no idea what

kind of response the display would invoke. In the main, it was a consciousness-raising exercise: most delegates spoke highly of the public library service and said they would be mentioning the display to their librarians. It will be interesting to see if this does happen.

The organising committee is grateful to have had the full support of the Group for 4 days, including setting up. Fourteen librarians gave willingly and cheerfully of their time, which proved to us that promotional activities are certainly important to the members of the library profession in Townsville.

## Talking information

As well as talking 'information' to conference delegates, it was a good opportunity to listen to what concerns local government in areas far from the main population centres, and how they go about solving their problems.

Problem solving in local government can be a costly exercise, when so many local authorities depend on outside help and advice. If we can prove that the gathering of information from our many sources can not only aid the process in its early stages, but also be cost effective in the long term, then we will have been of service to the local government industry. But before we get to that stage there is a lot of hard work to be done. Let's hope we can meet the challenge!

Pat Kirkman




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