

ML Q020.9  
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## Cryptic statistics

**A** plan for a national statistical database on libraries, using data to be collected by the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS), was initiated by the Council of Cultural Ministers earlier this year.

The Council appointed a Statistical Advisory Group (SAG) to prepare the 'Statistical Framework for the Culture and Leisure Industry'. Libraries are defined as one of its nine sub-sectors.

In *InCite* 10(7), 22 May 1989, Andy Exon (Research and Planning, Curtin University of Technology Library, Perth) gave an outline of SAG activities and progress, and voiced concerns and reservations held by members of the library community.

In this issue, Colin Steele reports on the third workshop and meeting held recently at the National Library of Australia (NLA), the difficulties encountered, and the action to be taken.

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### Sagging consultation processes

Representatives at the meeting — including NLA and Australian Council of Library and Information Services (ACLIS) representatives — expressed coordinated concern at the consultation process.

Ian Smith, the principal member of SAG, apologised for the misunderstandings, but said that the two 'major framework' volumes had been sent out for earlier comment and 'must have been lost in the post'. Then he indicated that his comments on the workshop draft had to be returned to him by the following Friday (27 October) so that the revised document could be circulated for widespread comment to the profession with a deadline of 31 January 1990. (The final document is being presented to the Cultural Ministers' Council in May 1990.)

The group decided it had been placed in an almost impossible position by SAG, and that their concerns would have to be passed on in other forums.

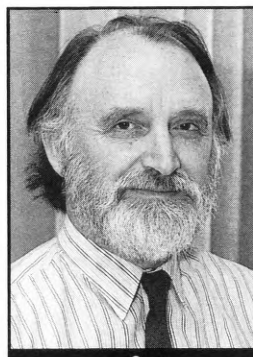
A meeting of NLA, ACLIS and ALIA representatives just before the main meeting took the view that the document as it stood was so damaging that not to amend it would be counter-productive. They worked through the day to remove the worst anomalies in all sectors — for example, tables on school libraries were erroneous; in national and State library figures, enquiries and interlibrary loans were added to make one table; University library figures juxtaposed monograph acquisition and serial holdings etc.

Sectoral representatives also agreed to revise the sector tables as far as possible, which involved much work. The brief in the short time available was — as Anthony Ketley from NLA put it — to:

- eliminate or correct inaccuracies;
- eliminate the tendentious and



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1 Colin Steele

2 Anthony Ketley

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unnecessary parts of the commentary and analysis; and

- insert some new comments intended to provide a sounder framework for the statistical analysis.

To those not involved, the above and its background may all seem a little cryptic, particularly as the documents supplied by SAG have not been seen by most of the profession. Indeed, all of the librarians involved in Canberra, except for Anthony Ketley, had only 1—3 days notice of their role in determining the nature of a draft of a library statistical overview that can be used positively or negatively by ministers, funding authorities etc.!

The Canberra group concentrated on the workshop papers, rather than commenting on changing the relevant sections of the 'blue and red books', as there will be time for this in the further consultation period. Nonetheless there are important changes to be made here within the framework of creators, products, organisations and consumers,

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