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Join up, pay up.

Attacking free library services in NSW.

The latest assault on free library services was delivered in the recent NSW Report of the Committee of Enquiry into Local Government Rating and other Revenue Powers and Resources, referred to as the Oakes Report, which advocates charging for all use of public libraries.

This report recommends 'a quarterly membership fee to be charged for library services limited to \$5 per quarter with annual increases to be limited to \$1 per quarter or 10% whichever is the greater. The Government to determine whether concessions should apply, the costs to form a charge against the subsidy' (p 107).

Whilst the report mentions possible subsidies from the State Government to assist 'needy sections of the community', there is no acknowledgement that the elderly, the disadvantaged, children and young people - the very groups who need encouragement and stimulation - will be discouraged by charges.

The Task Force to consider submissions, to be lodged by 31 August, does not include representation of library or other professional associations. Submissions may be made by 'any interested person or organisation'.

The ALIA Public Libraries Section (NSW Group) and the Association of Local Government Librarians in NSW have joined forces to mobilise support in defence of free public library services, and there has been strong support for this expressed by Councils, particularly through the Country Libraries Association.

At a joint meeting on 20 June, two groups were established. A 'Submission group' will prepare a submission to the Task Force on Local Government Rating. A second 'Campaign group' has been established to develop a plan of action to defend public library services and act as a resource group. The group co-ordinators would welcome comments and offers of assistance.

Submission group: John Flint (Willoughby Municipal Library) Campaign group: Alan Flores (Baulkham Hills Public Library)

It is important that politicians be lobbied to ensure that they understand that libraries are publicly funded organisations set up to achieve community objectives. They are not 'free' in the sense often used, but part of the general service provision of Local Government Authorities to their communities.

The ALIA is resolutely opposed to the principle of charging for public library services and its policy statements affirm that 'freedom of access to information is essential to the democratic process and to the social welfare of the community. That freedom can be as much inhibited by poverty as by censorship. Satisfaction of a person's information needs must not be contingent upon ability to pay'.

The importance of the the Oakes' report to the future and effectiveness of public libraries in NSW should not be underestimated, nor the possible implications for library services throughout australia.

AV Copyright Update

Amendments made to the Copyright Act by the Copyright Amendment Act, 1989 include provisions concerning audiovisual materials which is good news for librarians, particularly those in educational institutions.

An important new provision in Section 103C extends fair dealing with an audiovisual item to include use for the purposes of research or study. Librarians will recall that amendments made in 1986 to the Act provided for fair dealing for the purposes of criticism, review and reporting news. The new provision of fair dealing for the purpose of research or study extends to

library users of audiovisual material privileges similar to those which have long applied in the case of literary, dramatic, musical or artistic works. The conditions which constitute fair dealing for the purpose of research or study are specified in the Act.

For librarians of educational institutions and institutions assisting intellectually handicapped persons, the provisions in Part VA of the Act are a major step forward in allowing them to offer a fuller range of services to users who seek access to audiovisual materials.

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1st Biennial Conference
Perth - Western Australia
September 30-October 5, 1990
at the Perth Concert Hall