

# SERVICES TO MEMBERS

Bev Kirby's 'Frontline' (*inCite* 11, (8), 11 June 1990) focusing on the need for ALIA to market itself to past, current and potential members, struck a chord for this long-time member. The provision of services to members is something which has undeniably slipped a little due to the Canberra relocation, the challenges of the new building, and the need to recruit and train a new Membership Services Manager. The difficulties are further compounded by the vagaries of the ALIA computer, but even this problem should be solved in the near future, and there will be no excuse if we do not lift our game. Bev's account of her Victorian survey of lapsed and non-members shows how much ground needs to be regained. The drift to 'local presences' and the recent sprouting up, for example, of local newsletters reflects in part a dissatisfaction with centralised services from Head Office. To acknowledge this is not merely to indulge in the popular sport of bashing Head Office, but that the existing modes and menus need examination.

The conventional view is that ALIA is already offering a comprehensive range of services, and is doing a good job. Conference organisation, the Board of Education, Professional Development, ALIA Press, the Industrial Information Officer, and *inCite*, the SIGs and Sections are all evidence of this. Nonetheless, Bev suggests that these are not enough to attract and retain members, especially the vital new graduates, who walk away from us in cohorts. Why is this? One answer might be that most of these services are indirect in their impact and accessibility to the 'ordinary' member. Furthermore, access to many of them requires an additional cost — beyond that of the membership subscription — to exercise them so that strictly speaking, and despite their merits, they are not seen by members as services, but optional products to which they can, for payment of a fee, gain access.

Or, as in the case of the Board of Education, the 'service' is 'free', but its impact, though important (and perhaps diminishingly so) is so indirect as to be intangible to the ordinary member. Attendance at ALIA's big biennial bash is wonderful if you can afford it, but few who are not supported by their employers can afford to go. Our Biennial Conference is always only attended by a minority of members, and David Waters' letter on the costs of doing so was apposite; this wouldn't matter too much if it were a different minority each time, so that over a decade, every member got to at least one, but I would assert that this is not the case. ALIA's recent decision to appoint its own conference organiser needs to be looked at in relation

to services overall, as does the general tendency to appoint ALIA staff to particular portfolios forever, because a corollary of this specialisation is that the demands of the portfolio sometimes obscure the overall *raison d'être* of ALIA, which must be to serve its members. Perhaps this needs to be placed at the head of our statement of objectives?

Bev says 'We need a marketing plan, and we need it now.' 'Amen', I say. ALIA's customers are its members, and the only product it has to sell is service to those members. The then LAA's 1986 Corporate Review had this to say:

'The Association must become an initiator. Manufacturing companies do not wait for consumers to notify them of the need for a new product; they constantly reassess their existing and potential markets, look for holes in the market place that might be filled by a new product, and delete unnecessary lines.'

How might we set about developing such a plan, looking for new products, and deleting unnecessary lines? A market survey is the classic response. The 1986 Corporate Review was in fact a survey of ALIA's members to determine what kind of association they wanted, and some adjustment to services occurred as a result, including the 'unbundling' of the *ALJ*.

If ALIA is seriously to examine this question now, and I agree with Bev that we must, how might it be done? Ask the

members, obviously, but not before some consideration has been given to what services are already being provided, and the extent to which they are available to members. This mind-clearing should be an immediate priority, and as the President-elect, I would be happy to accept it as a major objective for the coming year, but I don't think we can wait that long to get started. Who would do the work? A small committee of no more than three, with the Membership Services Manager as its pivot, would do, with a time-frame of say, 4 months. It would look at major (Board of Education) and minor (membership applications and renewals processing) existing services, and consider what additional service might be offered, and which deleted, or scaled down. Input will of course be sought from the membership, including Divisions, but the committee should not be afraid to look more widely at what might reasonably be offered.

Bev Kirby's message is that service to members is one of the essential props on which ALIA rests; it is timely, with the appointment of a new Membership Services Manager and the opening of a new phase in ALIA's existence that this concept should be re-examined. Urgently.

John Levett  
Vice-President



## AUSTRALIAN LIBRARY & INFORMATION ASSOCIATION

### Election of Vice-President 1990

(President-elect 1991)

### Call for Nominations

In 1986, the General Council of the then Library Association of Australia resolved to change the composition of the Executive Committee from President, immediate Past-President, Vice-President, General Secretary, General Treasurer and Chairman of the Board of Education to President, Immediate Past-President, Vice-President and two members of the Council elected by the General Council to the Executive Committee.

The positions of General Treasurer and General Secretary are thus being abolished. This will be completed when revised By-laws are approved by the Governor-General. In the interim, these positions are being filled by the two members of Council elected to the Executive Committee.

In accordance with Division F Regulations, nominations are now called for the position of Vice-President 1991 (President-elect 1992). Nominees must be personal financial members of the Association. Candidates and nominators should read the relevant regulations carefully. Please note that nominations must be:

- in writing
- signed by two financial members of ALIA
- accompanied by the written consent of the nominee, who shall supply a current curriculum vitae and a statement of professional concerns (each of no more than 100 words).

Nominations must reach the Executive Director, PO Box E441, Queen Victoria Terrace, ACT 2600 by 5 pm on **3 September 1990**.