

The Australian Book Trade Committee 1981-1991

Cooperation in the book trade is a fragile flower. The Australian Book Trade Committee (ABTC) began in 1981, flourished for several years, wound down, and ceased to exist in mid-1991.

The ABTC was the first formal mechanism for cooperation between the different sectors of the book trade. It consisted of representatives of the Australian Library and Information Association (ALIA), the Australian Booksellers Association (ABA) and the Australian Book Publishers Association (ABPA). The initial brief of the ABTC was to 'consider matters affecting the publication and/or distribution of books and associated materials within Australia which may be of concern to the constituent bodies', to refer such matters to constituents, and to consider matters raised by them. It has been chaired by Denis Richardson (ALIA), Len Woodley (ABA), Jean Ferguson (ABA), Sally Milner (ABPA) and Bill Cations (ALIA).

In the early 1980s at least 50 per cent of the library trade in books was estimated to be with overseas-based suppliers, and it was said that the ABTC was created mainly to encourage local ordering by libraries. In fact the Australian Book Trade Committee did arise out of a seminar on local ordering held in 1981, and went on to hold its own Workshop on Local Ordering in Adelaide in 1982, and Library Purchase meetings in Melbourne and Sydney in 1983.

However, although its origin was in the local ordering issue, the ABTC over its 10 years of life has dealt with many other issues: Book prices in Australia; local stockholding by

by Derek Whitehead*



Australian agents; the creation of standards for order reporting (adopted as AS 2807-1985); the campaigns against sales tax on books in 1981 and 1985; the adoption of SANs (Standard Address Numbers) within Australia; Promotion of BISAC standards for the book industry; two surveys of book distribution in Australia; the debate over whether libraries acquire enough Australian books; and the monitoring of technology in all three sectors of the book trade, and efforts to ensure that compatible standards were adopted.

The ABTC has also been a general forum at which book trade issues could be canvassed across all three organisations. Technology has always been the most productive area of cooperation. The Books and Computers Seminar held in August 1985 marked the beginning of computerisation in the retail book trade; in 1988 the ABTC broadened its activities in this area by replacing its Standards Subcommittee by a new Standing Committee on Technology (SCOT), with a much wider brief. Earlier concerns with book prices and

local ordering have been replaced since the mid-1980s by a preoccupation with technology and infrastructure.

In earlier years the ABTC usually leaned towards support of the closed market, arguing only that the closed market should operate efficiently with regard to price, stockholding, reporting and distribution. The Library Supply Group was formed at this time as a group of suppliers who would agree to adhere to agreed standards. It continues to operate, under the auspices of the ABA. However, there have always been differing views, and the debate on amendment of the Copyright Act has brought major changes. It has led to increasing distance between the ABA and the ABTC and the irrelevance of libraries in what booksellers and publishers sometimes saw as a life and death issue. Efforts to achieve a book industry consensus on the issue were a failure.

The Australian Book Trade Committee has dealt with a wide range of issues over its 10 years of existence, and the issues have varied as needs have changed. It remains important for the sectors of the book trade to cooperate, and one must hope that other mechanisms will arise to make this possible; certainly the level of cooperation at present is low. We hope that librarians, booksellers and publishers will continue to talk to each other, and to work together to promote and develop an Australian book industry. □

*Chairman, Australian Book Trade Committee, 1990-1991

Cover story continued from 1...

Wednesday, 10 July, which include an evening at the Sydney Opera House to attend the Australian Opera's performance of 'The Mikado', or a Sydney Symphony Orchestra Concert. Alternatively, delegates can opt for a dinner cruise on Sydney Harbour, or just 'do their own thing'.

A most memorable part of the conference will be the dinner when delegates will have 'A Night in New Orleans'. The evening will commence with the presentation of the Dunn & Wilson Scholarship (sponsored by the bookbinders Apollo-Moon, L J Cullen, and Pritchards) and the Library Technician of the Year Award 1991 (sponsored by University Cooperative Bookshop Ltd). The delegates will then move to 'the French Quarter of New Orleans' where they will be wined, dined, entertained, and to where they might dance!

Optional day tours and pre/post conference tours have been offered for delegates to experience the magnificent City of Sydney and surrounding areas. In addition, James Bennett Library Services have offered an opportunity for delegates to visit their head office at 2.30 pm on 9 July.

The Trade Exhibition comprising ten stands will run for the duration of the

conference. The exhibitors are ABN Marketing (National Library of Australia), ALIA, Baker & Taylor, Bennet-EBSCO, Duff Steel, Dunn & Wilson, Enterprise/Trimagic Software, Ilanet (State Library of NSW), RAECO, and S & M Supply. The developments on display will stimulate delegates and will provide an important dimension to the information being presented at the conference.

The Organising Committee is delighted that its choice of venue, based on competitive costs and high quality facilities and services, has been confirmed. The Manly Pacific Parkroyal recently won the Meeting Industry Association 4 Star Venue Award for New South Wales. While the venue overlooks the South Pacific Ocean, the resort-suburb of Manly stands as the gateway to Sydney Harbour, and is only a 35-minute ferry ride, or a 13-minute journey on the hydrofoil, to the City of Sydney.

The 6th National Library Technicians Conference will offer an extensive and dynamic program. Delegates will be exposed to some of the challenges and issues that face library technicians, and they will be offered the opportunity for change and consolidation. They will also be able to share in an enjoyable social program.

Executive Track

'promises to become the headhunters' bible'

(Executive Recruiter News)

'a useful addition to libraries providing business information services'

(Australian Library Review)

'deciphers... and predicts the trends'

(Weekend Australian)

An indexed listing of over 1500 executive movements per quarter in all sectors of Australian business & industry

\$500 pa — disk or hard-copy

Call Jaine Stockler now for sample and further information



Corporate Impacts Publications
95 Rose St
CHIPPENDALE NSW 2008

Phone: (02) 318 2366 Fax: (02) 318 0861