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In the few weeks since taking up the position of Executive Director of the Australian Library and Information Association, I have had the opportunity to meet with representatives of a number of branches and sections. These occasions have provided me with a broad appreciation of many of the issues of importance to members and with views on the role and performance of the National Office. Such information is of value in determining the future directions of our national operations and, most particularly, will influence the way in which the office establishes mechanisms for improved communication with the membership and extends its representational role.

Before the end of this year I will have met with all ALIA branches and will have completed reviews of all aspects of our current activities. This process will inform the development of strategies to improve our performance especially in relation to the establishment of a higher profile for the profession in the political environment.

One of the major features of the library and information profession is the rapid rate of technological change which is taking place in the workplace. We can no longer subscribe to the maxim that 'the more things change the more they remain the same.' The tentacles of the technology revolution have extended relentlessly to encompass all aspects of our lives. Nonetheless many have observed a perception that the profession has been reluctant to explore new technology and to adopt new ways of working. In large part the profession has embraced and welcomed change, but the view that we have failed to respond to, and to be a part of, the information revolution, can have serious consequences for the image of the profession. The achievements of the profession remain, to many outsiders, a well-kept secret.

In addition to the obvious changes in the way we access information, there are even greater changes taking place in the quality and quantity of data that is now being generated and stored. As custodians of much of this information, librarians and information professionals are forced to focus on issues related to the storage of vast databanks and the conservation of this material. Little time and few resources have been allocated to recasting the image of librarians as skilled information professionals with a critical and central role in the management of information.

Anecdotes characterising librarians as conservative, bookish and belonging to a past era abound. In instances where librarians escape this stereotypical mould and demonstrate a high-level capacity to meet the challenges expected of the information management professional, they are often perceived as no longer being 'librarians'.

Many members have conveyed to me their concern at the current image of the profession and have discussed ways in which this might be addressed—or corrected. Many branches and sections are already formulating strategies to deal with this. The Association's strategic plan, developed by General Council in consultation with the membership, clearly identifies the need to 'influence governments, other organisations and the community by representing professional interests'. But greater coordination of effort is required to achieve success.

Those of you who are observers of, or who have been participants in, the development of public policy will be aware that the process of achieving a high degree of influence starts with determining the precise nature of the goals and outcomes we require. We must also set about identifying the influence holders whom we need to target. We cannot simply rely on one or two senior individuals in government

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or the public sector working on our behalf because such efforts may be seen as setting the agenda from the top down and are rarely effective.

The making of public policy is, in a sense, an organic thing which grows and alters. The final product will reflect the influence of numerous participants and the quality of their contributions to the debate. To be effective in this process we must anticipate, and possibly even invent, the policy debate and become an active part of the process. By this I mean that we must always be on the look-out for the appropriate policy forums in which we should become actively involved. If they do not exist in respect of specific issues we have identified as important, we must create our own debate.

To achieve success we must work together to establish our plans of action. We must continue to work effectively within our own organisations and with other related organisations to generate a wider constituency for what we are trying to achieve. We should aim ultimately to have our views routinely sought by the public policy decision makers and to become an integral part of the policy formulation process.

I look forward to the role that I can play in establishing for the profession the public standing that it has earned and deserves.

Finally, I seek your indulgence as I turn to what might be thought of as an unusual source of inspiration for a concluding comment:

"You must stir it and stump it,
And blow your own trumpet,
Or trust me, you haven't a
chance."

Ruddigore Act I, W.S. Gilbert ■