

Trading in futures

Alan Bundy shares his thoughts on the recent Public Libraries Conference

Alan also edited and published the *Proceedings*. In his Foreword he notes that it had been too long between conferences. The last national conference for Australian public libraries, *Sharing our skills*, was held just over ten years ago, in November 1983, at Monash University. A second Australian conference for public libraries was held in Melbourne 1-3 February of this year.

Alan continues: 'Public libraries: trading in futures' attracted over 300 participants from around Australia, and from New Zealand too, for what the historian of public libraries in 50 years time may well identify as a national turning point for them.

'The differences between the 1983 and the 1994 conference suggest why. In 1983 the program focus was professional exchange, and it contained some interesting, and still relevant, papers on topics such as literacy, community information, service to ethnic communities and Aborigines. There were just 69 participants, overwhelmingly from Victoria, with some states not represented at all. There were no elected representatives from local government. By contrast *Trading in futures* was, in participatory terms, a claimant to be the first Australian national public libraries conference. There was good representation from all states and territories, New Zealand and of elected councillors and aldermen.'

'So what did the 1994 confer-

ence, the outcome of much hard work by Doug Savage and his Victorian ALIA and Technilib colleagues, achieve? Apart from the usual benefits which such conferences provide, including an excellent trade exhibition, perhaps the major achievement was recognition of the need for a national strategic focus so that public libraries can lead in society's future. The state and territory parochialness which has thwarted national and coordinated advocacy of the importance of public libraries is at least now a debating point.

'Manifestations of this achievement were:

- a decision to establish a national working group to identify the best way of implementing a national organisation and focus for public librarians and libraries;
- acceptance by ALIA of responsibility for publishing a database of all Australian public library organisations and associations;
- a decision to hold the second national conference in Sydney in 1995 and thereafter in Adelaide;
- the outcomes of a strategic planning forum held immediately after the conference.'

The *Proceedings* make a well-presented volume of 190 pages, containing twenty-two papers including the panel discussion *Return on investment* but not the discussion in other sessions. Topics included social indicators, future markets, technology,

local government, information and democracy, testing the market, open learning, the future of the public library. A nice touch by the editor is *They said it*, essentially four pages of 'pull quotes', such as *Stop thinking of libraries as collections. Start thinking of them and promoting them as access points* (Alison Crook), printed all together at the front on coloured paper.

These *Proceedings* should be required reading for all public librarians and all who fund or administer them. Their colleagues in other libraries have also much to gain from the papers. Another conference, *Public libraries: what are they worth*, will be held in Sydney, 13-15 November 1995. Put it in your diary now.

Public Libraries: trading in Futures is available from the Auslib Press, PO Box 622, Blackwood SA 5051, telephone: (08) 278 4363, fax: (08) 278 4000, price \$36 plus \$8 p&ch. ISBN 1 875145 29 X.



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