

AGPS — '...the information managers within government'?

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AGPS is re-examining its fundamental role and range of activities. This has been prompted by the recent Prices Surveillance Authority (PSA) report on AGPS pricing policy (see 'Prices surveillance and the AGPS', *inCite*, volume 14 (6), June 1993, p30). Alan Law, AGPS General Manager, says the government publishing service now sees itself as '...ensuring efficient and adequate access to government information', with a new role of being 'the information managers within government.' Of course, it now has a new Vision Statement (hasn't everyone?). AGPS' vision is of '...a future where all Australians have easy and affordable access to government information'—a vision with which librarians will have considerable sympathy.

If the new AGPS rhetoric seems appropriate, if flowery, what of the specifics? AGPS sees itself as implementing a revised Charter by 1 July 1995, with initiatives in four areas:

- a strengthened public interest role, which it sees as including standards in such areas as electronic publishing;
- a comprehensive central register of government information. This would include summaries and synopses, and be marketed as a database. Comprehensive-ness would be improved through such possible mechanisms as listing of publications in annual reports or compulsory registration of publications. The former 'tied publishing' arrangements had not achieved this, as librarians well know, with current listings including only an estimated 30-40% of eligible publications. Tied publishing is also regarded as incompatible with current government trends towards devolution of responsibility, AGPS sees a new approach here as essential;
- the widest possible distribution and access arrangements, including through revision of the existing library deposit scheme and by making electronic informa-

tion available through public libraries;

- ensuring that the inevitable 'user pays' component does not ration access to government information.

The second and third of these are of particular concern to us as a profession. I think we must accept that 'tying' of AGPS clients to its services—requiring government agencies to publish only through it, as recommended by the Erwin Report—has not really been successful. It will be more productive if we now cooperate with AGPS to ensure its new central register is as complete, current and informative as possible, and that revisions to the deposit and free issue schemes improve rather than reduce access to government information.

These were the conclusions the librarian members of AALC, the ACLIS-AGPS Liaison Committee, came to at its most recent meeting, held in Canberra on 10 June. Members of the Committee will be responding to a series of Discussion Papers AGPS intend to release in order to obtain comment and support from its various client and customer groups, including the library profession. Copies of these will be circulated to the various organisations represented on AALC, including ALIA (represented on the Committee by Peter Clayton, who would be happy to provide further information).

At its meeting, several new AGPS services and publications were also demonstrated or described to the Committee. These included an electronic copy of the budget papers and White Paper on employment; a proposed database of Commonwealth legislation which would provide 'one stop' access to information about bills, acts in force, repealed and subordinate legislation, and replace the current *Commonwealth legislation catalogue*; *AGAAA! Australian government acronyms and abbreviations*; and *Commonwealth repealed Acts 1901-1993*, which is planned to publish biennially. The 1992 annual catalogue will be released shortly. ■

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