Direct Line

Virginia Walsh
Executive Director

I t is vitally important to ensure that broad national and international cross-sectoral consideration is given to issues evolving from the impact of converging technologies in the field of scholarly publishing.

This is underscored by the fact that many of the interests and concerns of the library and information sector are shared by, or involve, other sectors and industries in the Australian and international communities.

The willingness and enthusiasm to address the issues involved has been highlighted by the distinguished guests who attended the Round Table on Scholarly Publishing at ALIA House, Canberra on 24 August.

Organised by the National Scholarly Communications Forum, of which ALIA is an active member, the forum attracted 36 representatives from academic, state and the national libraries, various academic faculties, publishing houses, network managers and authors.

The event was designed to build on the success of the April 1993 conference *Changes in scholarly communications patterns,* which was followed by an ALIA conference *Electronic scholarly communication: the library response,* also held in April 1993. Excellent accounts of these events can be read in the Australian Library Journal, Vol 42, N° 2, May 1993.

The Round Table is the first of three planned over the next six months. The second, on 13-14 October will be on *Public access to networked information* and the third, on 20 February 1995 will be on *Intellectual property and copyright.*

Each event seeks to further develop the inter- and intra-sectoral dialogue on emerging communication patterns and the most appropriate policy and operational responses to the issues that emerge. This first Round Table was set up by a working party with representatives from the Academy of Science, The Academy of Technological Sciences and Engineering, ALIA and AC-LIS — all members of the National Scholarly Communications Forum.

The event was chaired by ALIA President Bill Linklater and the concluding session co-ordinated by Tom Cochrane, until recently the President of ACLIS.

For more information about the next Round Table being organised by the Forum, contact: The Secretariat, Round Table on Scholarly Publishing, Australian Academy of Humanities, GPO Box 93, Canberra, ACT 2601. Telephone: (06) 248 7744, facsimilie: (06) 248 6287, or E-mail aah@anu.edu.au.

The big picture
Converging technologies and scholarly publishing

O ne clear conclusion from the first Round Table, although perhaps still not universally acknowledged, is that the pace of change is rapid, bringing with it the risk that individual and uncoordinated responses will be made by publishers, authors and the custodians of information.

It was reported at the talks that one US University already had decided to cancel all its journal subscriptions. While this was accepted as an extreme and perhaps eccentric response to the problems associated with the acquisition of serials, an observable trend towards increased inter-library borrowing and lower rates of serial purchasing was demonstrated by a number of presenters.

This last point was addressed by Director of the Office of Scientific and Academic Publishing at the Association of Research Libraries (ARL) in the US Ann Okerson, who provided the opening and keynote presentation.

Recent figures from ARL show that in their member libraries over a seven-year period from 1986-1993:
• Monograph volumes purchased fell 23 per cent
• Serial subscription fell 5 per cent
• Total students rose 11 per cent
• Teaching faculty rose by 16 per cent
• Graduate students rose 22 per cent
• Inter-library lending rose 41 per cent and inter-library borrowing rose 77 per cent.

Other speakers referred to the rapidly increasing level of on-line academic publication. The University of Pennsylvania's Professor James O'Donnell outlined his own publishing and teaching activities on the Internet.

Australian speakers described the advantages of providing access to scholarly information in digitised format on an as-required basis.

Many insights into the needs of researchers were given to us by the University of Sydney's Dr Damon Ridley, from the School of Chemistry, who concluded that the need for large, on-site serial collections is overemphasised because computerised literature retrieval offers many advantages (browsing, keyword searching) and because fax facilities deliver documents rapidly.

However, issues such as copyright, cataloguing — especially in cases where there are multiple versions of an article — and cost remain perplexing.

While issues associated with academic publishing were under the microscope at this Round Table, the relevance of many of these issues to the broader publishing and writing community were not overlooked.

Presentations from International Business Communications' Oliver Freeman, Allen & Unwin's John Iremonger and the Australian Society of Authors' Sara Dowse identified some of the impacts that electronic publication will have,