



**Bill Linklater**  
President, ALIA

**I**n my very first *Front Line* in March I indicated that two of my major concerns could be summarised as international relations and the push for democratisation of access to national and international electronic networks.

It is only seven months since I made this comment and the current situation in both areas has, to my pleasure, changed significantly in that short time.

International relations has been the steady if not dramatic improver. The reconstituted International Relations Committee held its first meeting on 24 June in Canberra and has decided to meet again in New Zealand during the NZLIA/ALIA Joint Conference as all of its members will be attending that forum.

The conference program gives some indication of the increased interest and awareness in this area. There are two consecutive plenary sessions on 27 September, each with a number of speakers with expertise in particular geographic regions.

The first deals with library and information services in southeast Asia, which I will chair; the second deals with library and information services in the Pacific, with one of our NZ colleagues chairing this session. It is hoped these sessions will provide some input to planning for future relations in the region.

There are also two special interest sessions, East Asia Online, organised by the East Asian Library Resources Group of Australia, and a forum on library associations in the Asia-Pacific region organised by the ALIA Asia Pacific Special Interest Group and chaired by Con-

vener of APSIG, Anthony Ketley.

In summary, the conference will provide a lot for those of us interested in librarianship in our own geographic region and I am looking forward to these particular sessions in Wellington.

The promotion of the need for democratisation of access to national and international electronic networks (the Internet) has certainly been the growth area in the past six months. I have talked to various Division groups on this topic and this has had to be very dynamic, as the situation changes week by week. When I wrote my March *Front Line* there was very little real interest shown throughout our profession and it was being promoted by only a small number of senior librarians in the country.

Furthermore, in the beginning of 1994 the only real access to national and international networks was through AARNet (the Australian Academic and Research Network), and because this is a network 'owned' by the Australian Vice-Chancellors Committee it was available mainly to universities and research-based institutions.

The redeveloped ILANET through the State Library of NSW allowed access to AARNet and then to the Internet early in 1994 but this was still very institution based.

In March this year true public access to the networks became available through a number of vendors who are marketing purchased services from AARNet at very reasonable rates. This has led to a rapidly growing level of increased interest and to a variety of in-

***There is still an urgent need for development of an ALIA public access network policy and it is expected that the new ALIA Information Technology Committee will provide the first version of this policy in the near future.***

puts that may significantly contribute to determining future network access policy in Australia. There is still an urgent need for development of an ALIA public access network policy and it is expected that the new ALIA Information Technology Committee will provide the first version of this policy in the near future.

One of the most dramatic illustrations of the lateness of this interest in networking by our profession can be seen by reference to our own planning processes. In late 1993 General Council sought the advice of all Divisions on their ranking of important issues that should receive priority within the Strategic Plan for 1994. The need for network access, promotion and training did not even rate in this process!

By mid-1994, however, the broad area of information technology and particularly networking was receiving priority attention in most areas of the Association and this is perhaps best illustrated by the recent Branch surveys of training and development needs, which indicate an overwhelming need for training in new technologies in nearly all returns.

The Association is taking appropriate action in this area and apart from the new Information Technology Committee previously mentioned, other initiatives include the Board of Education looking at the provision of continuing professional education in IT; and the development of strategic issues documents by Branches — of which the ACT Branch document if probably the best model — that incorporate IT issues such as network access, promotion and training in their planning. ■