

Public libraries: trading in futures

Douglas Savage summarises the outcome and points to the way ahead

The national conference, *Public libraries: trading in futures*, convened by Technilib and ALIA Public Libraries Section (Victoria Group), in Melbourne 1-3 February, was a great success.

While the ideas were still at white heat, a small group came together as a Strategic Planning Forum to try to ensure that those ideas could be brought to fruition. Alan Bundy was the facilitator and Douglas Savage (Technilib) was recorder, Charles Landry from the UK and Ernie DiMattia from the USA were consultants and Brian McKeon was an observer on behalf of the NZLIA.

The key issues had been identified by the Conference. The Forum urged that action on the resolutions of the Forum will have been completed before the next national public libraries Conference, in Sydney in November 1995, so that it can consider a report on what has been achieved.

The Forum strongly supported a continuing series of public library conferences on an approximately biennial basis to serve as the general focus for national public library concerns, the means for monitoring progress of public library development, and a mechanism for continuing education opportunities in the public library industry.

It also encouraged the ALIA Board of Education to identify the continuing education needs of public library staff and stimulate provision of courses and other opportunities to satisfy those needs.

The establishment of the Cultural Ministers' Council Working Group on Libraries, chaired by Paul Clarkson (Director, Arts Victoria), was welcomed by the Forum and was also a major factor contributing to the outcomes of the Forum. The Working Group had held its inaugural meeting on the day before the Conference.

The Forum made a large

number of resolutions, each of which has a time-frame for completion and identifies an organisation

for promoting and defending Australian public libraries. In particular ALIA should stimulate



(Front row, left to right): Graham Dudley, Office of Library Services, Arts Victoria; Jenny Ruffy, Carringbush Regional Library; Alix Johnston, Technilib (Convenor, Arrangements Committee); Christine Mackenzie, Peninsula Library Service; Anne Burnett, Upper Murray Regional Library; Deborah Lisson, Technilib (Convenor, Program Committee) (Back row, left to right): Daniel Ferguson, Altona City Library; Douglas Savage, Technilib; Roisin Jacobs, Dandenong Valley Regional Library Service; Jane King, Carringbush Regional Library; Rod Blacker, Sunshine Library and Information Services; Alasdair Wardel, Dandenong Valley Regional Library Service. (Absent): Tim Burwer, Brunswick Public Library; Sue Noble, Raeco Pty Ltd

tion or person to carry it through. A copy of the full record of the Forum is being sent to organisations identified as having a major interest in public libraries.

The principal resolutions are summarised below:

A. Communication and advocacy

A.1 Community involvement

Resolutions here were concerned with the importance of public libraries having strategic community and business alliances.

A.2 Federal, State/Territory, regional and local networks

The Forum urged that the Council of Australian State Librarians (CASL) reactivate its public libraries working party and its public library statistics working party. Consistent national public library statistics and a ten-year statistical database were identified as very important needs.

A.3 Publicity and public relations

Public libraries play a critical role in developing public perceptions of libraries. ACLIS and ALIA need to develop specific strategies

inter-sectoral and cross-sectoral advocacy within the profession.

B. Service and marketing

B.1 Users' Bill of Rights

The Forum asked ALIA to revise and update its national public library standards and encourage their use by state and local governments.

B.2 Access and technology

Access to electronic networks is an item of the highest priority for public libraries. Special efforts are needed to establish and extend public library access to these networks, so that 90% of Australia's population would be served by a public library with network access by the next Conference.

C. Funding and economics

The Forum called for study of alternative and supplemental support for public libraries, and an investigation of a common approach to assets valuation issues for public libraries. The Forum also saw it as important for case studies to be undertaken to demonstrate the practical, social and economic benefits which flow from the investment in public libraries. ■