

Northern Territory library

Sheila Forrest, Manager, Reference and Parliamentary services talks about the new NT library.

The closure of the former Parliamentary Library and the State Library of the Northern Territory, and the relocation of all assets to the new Parliament House complex in Darwin has been successfully achieved. The new Northern Territory Library is truly a joint use facility, offering library services to members of the public, members of the Legislative Assembly and their staff, staff of the Department of the Chief Minister, as well as the Administrator and staff.

The move and the merger were the culmination of four years planning which began with the announcement early in 1991 that the two libraries would move into the new Parliament House in the State Square complex on completion of building works. During the last four years library staff worked closely with the developers, architects and interior designers to ensure that the new library was functional and comfortable.



Originally designed as the building car park this space has been transformed by the introduction of natural light. Photo: Peter Torr

On 25 November 1994 a wake was held to mourn the closure of the State Library. Over 200 library users and staff commemorated the service which had been provided by the library since it opened in 1980, and wished it well in its new guise in its new location. Many months of planning had gone into the physical relocation of the two libraries and to the credit of all involved the move went exceptionally smoothly. Darwin has just experienced its most torrential wet season, but fortunately the record 'wet' did not begin until after the move was substantially completed.

By 9 January 1995 all was in place in the magnificent new library premises in Parliament House. There, the library is located on one side of the Great Hall, the Parliament on the other. The library's reference and the Northern Australia collections are housed on the entry floor; the main collection, government publications, newspapers, serials on the floor below; a special humidity and temperature controlled display area is located on the lower mezzanine for special collections; and the parliamentary reading area on the upper mezzanine.

The new geography has greatly encouraged library usage by parliamentarians and their staff, and it has coincided with the foreshadowing of legislation to legalise voluntary euthanasia in the Northern Territory. This has generated an enormous demand for information about euthanasia generally, and about the experience in jurisdictions where voluntary euthanasia has been permitted by law. The new library's Internet connections

were put to the test, and passed with flying colours.

Library tours and other educational measures have been running virtually non-stop since early January. A popular feature of the tours has been demonstrations of 'Territory images', the library's laser disc based collection of more than 40 000 historic photographs which can now be retrieved by on-line search and reviewed on screen.

One result of the move into the government precinct has been greatly increased library usage by government departments, as well as by Parliamentarians. Another outcome of the move has been extended library opening hours during sittings of the Legislative Assembly, when the library stays open until 8 pm.

Much admired features of the new library's physical infrastructure include purpose built furniture and other design details. A remnant of an historic stone wall incorporated in the library's entry foyer marks the site of the old post office, where there was heavy loss of life during the first air raids on Darwin on 19 February 1942. A World War II commemorative quilt which graces the wall the entrance. The quilt is an assembly of thousands of signed patches, each one commemorating wartime associations in the Territory of an individual or family. The quilt was designed and made by a member of the library's Northern Australia collection staff.

Once again we are proving that it is different up here. The new library was opened by the Minister with responsibility for libraries, the Hon Steve Hatton MLA, on 22 May. ■

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