



**Virginia Walsh**  
Executive director

**A**LIA continues to actively promote the interests of the library community through participation in a range of Federal Government inquiries. In this issue of *inCite* we provide a summary of the current status of recent and current inquiries. Copies of ALIA submissions are available from the ALIA National Office for any interested members.

Two recent initiatives are worthy of note. The Community Information Network was launched recently and the research of the Bureau of Transport and Communications Economics on the Communications Futures Project was concluded with the publication of a comprehensive report.

### The Community Information Network (CIN)

The Minister for Social Security, Mr Peter Baldwin, launched the CIN at Parliament House Canberra on 24 June. The network will provide free access to government and community information and will provide limited Internet access through 100 access points located in libraries, social security offices and community organisations. Within a few months the number of access points is expected to rise to at least three hundred.

Minister Baldwin said 'CIN is an important first step in the government's commitment to ensuring that all Australians are able to access the benefits of electronic networks. It is also integral to establishing a "single window" for the delivery of government services and information to all Australians.'

If you have access to the Internet you will get a good overview of what CIN offers at <http://www.cin.gov.au>. The service, while at a very early stage of development, is very impressive. It will include government information pages for each state — including local government information. Local

service information will include such things as bus timetables and library opening hours. There will be a number of news groups operating for participants to exchange information and subjects of specific interest such as the environment, regional development, social security and opportunities for small business. A *Women and farms network* will be established in Tasmania which will embrace rural women in twenty communities. It will provide information on training and computer software and it seeks to build social networks and support groups.

Minister Baldwin has already committed over \$4 million in establishing CIN and there is much more to come. Given all the talk over the last two years in government circles about the need for community networks, Baldwin is to be congratulated in seizing the initiative and moving quickly to this implementation phase. There promises to be major advantages for all types of libraries through participation in the CIN and through accessing government information held on the network.

### Communications futures project (CFP)

The Bureau of Transport and Communications Economics released the final report of its Communications Futures Project on 15 May.

The report contains the results of modelling work undertaken by the CFP on the economics of rolling out residential communications networks in Australia over the next decade and draws out some policy implications for the government, particularly regarding competition and equity.

Much of the work of the CFP has already been released in a series of work-in-progress papers. This report brings together this work and provides a perspective on developments expected over the next decade.

Some of the main findings of the report, based on this modelling work, are:

- a cable network is unlikely to be economic, even in high-density urban areas, if based on pay TV revenue alone;
- however, with telephony revenue as well, there is the possibility of a dual rollout in some inner urban areas, given reasonably high penetration level;
- the cost to government of subsidising access to a cable network for rural and remote communities could amount to over \$1 billion per year. The paper points to the difficulty of defining a new universal service obligation which might supersede the current obligation to provide a standard telephony service;
- interactive broadband services are unlikely to be widely available in Australia until around the end of the decade and so the new cable-based residential communications networks are likely to remain primarily entertainment based in their early years;
- this is because the commercial success of interactive and communicative services will, on present trends, require significant social and behavioural changes and major shifts in household budget expenditure.

It is this final point which provides a compelling argument for providers of communications networks such as Telstra and Optus to provide support for networked services through schools and libraries. The development of information literacy within the broad community will assist with the required social and behavioural changes that are needed for commercial success.

The report is available from Commonwealth Government bookshops in all State capital cities and in Canberra, by AGPS Phoneshop 1800 020049; by fax (06) 295 4888; or by mail order from the publisher, AGPS Mail Order Sales, GPO Box 84, Canberra, ACT 2601. Recommended retail price is \$16.95. AGPS catalogue n° 95 02009. ■

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