

Development of disaster plans

As part of research for a handbook on disaster recovery I am looking at the development of disaster plans in Australian institutions. I am particularly interested in institutions who developed disaster plans prior to the National Library fire in 1985. I understand that the Australian Archives had such a plan — any others?

Ideally, I would like to acquire copies of disaster plans (both pre- and post-1985) but I recognise that such plans can be sensitive documents and, if so, then perhaps the institutions would be willing to supply a copy of the contents page? While this would not provide detail it would give me an idea of how the plan was set up.

I can be contacted via e-mail at: ajdoig@netspace.net.au or at my mailing address: 5/39 Aintree Road, Glen Iris, 3146.

Judith Doig

Imbalance of service

I am writing regarding *Front Line* August *inCite*. In particular I would like to take issue with the very offensive comments about the perceived imbalance of services to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and the policy which, according to Jan Gaebler, has only happened because of political correctness.

If you are going to get on your soapbox, at least get it right. The policy does not advocate reverse discrimination and the imbalance of library services to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people is not perceived, it is real.

I have included a bibliography with this letter. Start with Maisie Wilson, Phillis Williams and Mick Dodson, who are amongst the many Aboriginal people who have written about libraries. Jan, if you are as passionate as you say you are about equal treatment and freedom of choice, then instead of making throwaway statements about political correctness, perhaps you could take time to listen and have the love to understand, because there is more to all this than facts and figures.

It is simply empty rhetoric to use warm and fuzzy phrases like 'live and let live' in 1995 without looking at the big picture of Australia's history.

It's a pity that the invaders of this country didn't live and let live. If the many atrocities such as the poisoning of waterholes and other killings of Aboriginal people had not happened, generations of children would not have been taken from their families, and libraries would not need to deal with the question of stolen cultural

property, amongst a myriad of other issues.

The violence of colonialism continues to have its effect to this day.

Speaking of censorship, I think it is important to remember how censored the history of Australia has been up until the late eighties. In fact, it has been termed the *Great Australian Silence* and it shows in attitudes of people like yourself who can talk of equal treatment in one breath and then of reverse discrimination and perceived imbalances in the next.

Museums are light years ahead of us in terms of taking into consideration our heritage of colonisation. The Council of Australian Museum Associations document *Previous possessions, new obligations*, is based on the recognition that different and varying interests exist in the cultural heritage of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples have primary rights in respect to their cultural heritage. This includes tangible and intangible cultural property. Museums are also actively employing Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders as a result of this recognition.

Information about Aboriginal people was very often taken without permission. The Strehlow case is a documented example of how information was published against the wishes of the people. Is it not an offence to handle stolen goods? And this is what libraries are dealing with in certain cases — stolen information.

We cannot therefore, much as we might like, make simple statements about censorship because in some cases, restricting access is simply an ethical responsibility to respect the wishes of the Aboriginal people in question (see Graeme Neates article which outlines legal cases).

There are so many complex issues that libraries have to address with regard to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and information, and as librarians we have a moral responsibility to do this.

ALIA's policy on library services for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people is a good beginning and I would like to congratulate those individuals within our association who have seen this policy through, who have talked to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and have endeavoured to get it right, despite unhelpful articles accusing them of committeeism and political correctness.

If, as librarians, we are truly going to live and let live, then we have an ethical responsibility to fully understand what that means. Let us stop censoring our minds and hear every-

one's story with our hearts. Let us have high ideals, as long as we are prepared to grapple with the complexities.

Heather Moorcroft

An extensive bibliography was included with this letter, space restrictions did not allow us to reproduce it here — Ed.

An open letter to the President...

I have been provoked into writing this open letter to you by your August *Front Line*. Your rather confused article (or is it a review of Peter Biskup's *Libraries in Australia*?) could do great harm to our profession, undoing the achievements of our predecessors and colleagues whom you praise in your concluding sentences. It is particularly inappropriate in this *International Year of Tolerance* and at a time in which we are pursuing nationally the vital process of Aboriginal reconciliation.

You advocate a "live and let live" philosophy that abhors any form of censorship or discrimination, 'access to a free-flow of information and ideas', and 'the individual's right to equal treatment and to freedom of choice', suggesting that these 'ideals' are threatened by a reluctance to take an active stance and by political correctness. You instance three cases, one concerning the reported views of a library director, one the Association's consideration of a statement on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and libraries, and one on the proposed racial hatred bill.

Contrary to your assertions, I think we have a proud history of resisting censorship of information and ideas. We take very seriously our responsibilities to hold, preserve and make available a diversity of views, ensuring balance in our collections and in our advice to clients. However, we also recognise that we have a responsibility to develop collections and services which are appropriate to our particular clienteles and that, in some circumstances, we have a duty of care which overrides our commitment to freedom of access. Such a responsibility is obvious in school libraries but might also apply in communities in which great offence might be caused by free access to dangerous, offensive or privileged materials. While I do not support censorship, I do believe selection policies should be suitable for the needs of each library's clients. I recognise that it would be inappropriate to select some materials for inclusion in some collections or to promote to some clients. In regard to the Internet, this might involve the use of filters for public access terminals in school and, perhaps, public libraries — analogous to the use of film classification codes.

Resolution of these questions is not easy, it requires both a whole-hearted commitment to freedom of access and a respect for the needs and views of our clients, pandering neither to the minority nor the majority.

Your comments on the proposed ALIA statement on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and libraries are inaccurate and offensive. You assert that the statements 'advocates reverse discrimination to "correct" the perceived imbalance that now exists in providing library service to the Aboriginal community and in encouraging Aboriginal participation in our profession'. So much for accuracy! The draft statement does no such thing, it simply recognises that we and our libraries can play a part in the important process of reconciliation with indigenous peoples by ensuring that our organisations and services actively involve Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. This we have demonstrably failed to do. The few indigenous people employed in our libraries are clustered at lower levels, their numbers do not reflect their representation in the population of Australia.

Although I know of no study of Aboriginal representation in our client-tes, I think I would be right in sus-

pecting under representation — is it appropriate that we should neglect potential clients on racial grounds?

As for your offensive gibe, 'Are we going to follow this with an individual policy of the Greek, Muslim, and Sikh communities...?', I would note that the Association has had a statement on libraries and multiculturalism since 1984. I would hope that those of us with Greek, Islamic and/or Sikh clients would be striving to meet their particular needs.

Your third case perplexes me since you don't relate it to libraries. It seems that you see the *Racial Hatred Bill* as another example of the heinous sin of 'political correctness', censoring the expression of ideas. This is not the focus of the legislation but might be its effect. I personally think it is neither a sensible nor useful addition to our statutes, though I do understand the anger and frustration of those subjected to racial abuse.

I would have been more convinced of your commitment to intellectual freedom if your article had decried the attempts to suppress authors such as Helen Garner and Helen Demidenko, who have both, in very different ways, challenged orthodoxies. Their experience, like the infamous fatwah against Salman Rushdie and many other instances, lie in our

heartland: does your library hold their books? and the commentaries of their critics and supporters?

I am very proud to be a librarian, to be able to do my little bit to further our long tradition of collecting, preserving and transmitting history, culture and ideas. I believe we have a solemn responsibility to the past, present and future. Far from your weak kneed 'live and let live' tolerance, we stand for a vigorous, passionate commitment to preserving and making available the universal record of experience and imagination.

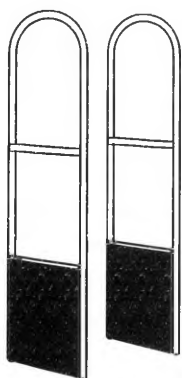
In Australia we have a particular responsibility to reconciliation with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, a responsibility highlighted through the *Report of the Royal Commission into Aboriginal deaths in custody*, such harrowing works as Deborah Bird Rose's *Hidden histories*, and Barbara Cummings' *Take this child*, and the contemporary tragedies of 'the stolen generation'. This is not a responsibility that we can glibly shuffle aside with cheap cracks about 'political correctness'. Although it has difficult and complex implications, I am delighted that the Association is belatedly addressing it in consultation with indigenous people, our clients and potential clients.

Alex Byrne, NT

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