

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.

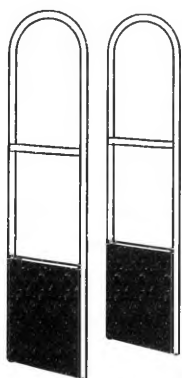
In Australia we have a particular responsibility to reconciliation with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, a responsibility highlighted through the *Report of the Royal Commission into Aboriginal deaths in custody*, such harrowing works as Deborah Bird Rose's *Hidden histories*, and Barbara 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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