

Adverse discrimination?

To say I was astounded and offended by the outrageous statements made by the President concerning the Association's development of the policy statement on library services for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people (*Frontline*, August 1995) would be an understatement.

From a personal point of view as the initiator of the project, I have to vigorously protest the suggestion that the policy promotes adverse discrimination. Librarianship has never been a universally benign profession. One of the negative impacts of literacy and libraries in colonised countries has been their role in acculturating the indigenous population into the ways of the coloniser. In many ways this resulted in the discounting of indigenous knowledge and the role of knowledgeable people in the transmission of that knowledge. At the same time, the intellectual property of indigenous peoples has been appropriated, and sacred and secret information of great cultural import treated in a cavalier fashion.

That ALIA took the decision to develop the policy is an overt acknowledgment that the profession has finally come to an understanding of previous sins of omission and commission. Equitable service does not necessarily mean 'equal', in the sense of homogenous.

The ingrained service principles of librarians have long acknowledged that each user should be served according to that user's specific needs.

That must include doing no harm to that person.

This is not political correctness. It is respect for the humanity of others. The suggestion about Greeks, Muslims and Sikh's is a red herring. The bottom line fact is that Australian librarians may offend people from non-Australian cultures, but, precisely because those cultures are maintained and nurtured in their home countries, we cannot irretrievably damage them. It is geography, not race, that requires us to accept a particular responsibility to the oldest culture in the world.

Finally, I am moved to comment that there is an unfortunate irony in the President's remarks relating to nuclear testing. Australian Aboriginal people are the only group of people in the world who have had both their persons and their land directly affected by mining of uranium and detonation of atomic weapons.

While the profession can do little about that, except to make sure that the record is accurate and public on this matter, it can and must ensure that libraries are very much part of the process of reconciliation.

Jennifer Cram, manager library services, Qld Department of Education

Australian document delivery

Recently a number of Australian libraries have been increasing their use of overseas commercial document delivery services, even for serials that are held in Australia. While nobody would question the use of such services for serials not held in this country, there are significant dangers in using them for serials that are held here.

If this trend continues, it is likely that jobs will be lost in Australian libraries as most document delivery work shifts overseas. We will become dependent on foreign suppliers, who will be able to dictate to us on prices and levels of service.

It is also likely that, even when the more expensive serial subscriptions have been cancelled, there will be a net flow of money out of Australia, thereby worsening our already alarming current account deficit.

Australian librarians seem to be assuming that this trend is inevitable, since, they think, we cannot compete with overseas document delivery services, particularly when it comes to speed of delivery.

But there is no valid reason why we cannot compete. We could even, if we were prepared to cooperate more effectively, set up an Australian commercial document delivery service along the lines of the popular UnCover, which could supply not only Australian libraries, but also those overseas, especially in the Asia-Pacific region.

First of all, however, Australian libraries must immediately commit themselves to providing prompt, reliable and inexpensive document delivery services to each other. We can and must provide a better service than our overseas competitors.

Tim Slocum, NSW

Service vs CCT

We are writing to you on behalf of our many silent housebound clients an on behalf of the services that we have helped to build up over the years.

As the Home Library Services Special Interest Group we feel that we must alert you and the membership to the dubious and damaging process of CCT in this State (Victoria), whereby the Victorian Government has introduced an Act to force all councils to tender out services. Councils must expose 50 per cent of their expenditure to tender over the next two financial years, including libraries. We feel that it is not necessary to tender out library services. CCT puts emphasis on cost, rather than quality, despite the glib official views to the contrary.

Our group depends on networking and sharing of information and the CCT process can hinder the free-flow of information between libraries. Under CCT libraries are competing, which makes them reluctant to share information. This may lead to loss of the tender.

We believe that it is morally wrong and unethical for members of our profession to aid and abet management in any 'take-over' of another public library service, under the provisions of CCT.

Housebound librarians are feeling the brunt of the free-for-all of CCT. We hope that all our colleagues will join us in the fight.

Our library services are already lean, mean and hungry and we know that we can make our own bids, but we will have to reduce wages and cut staff numbers to be successful and slash the book vote.

Public libraries are not businesses and it is absurd to try and fit us into a corporate structure.

Home library services special interest group

Australian Library and Information Research (ALIR)

Thank you to everyone who has supported ALIR by sending me information on current and completed research projects. I am always looking for new material, so please let me and the library world know what you are doing to extend the frontiers of knowledge.

Date report forms are available from Neville Aylmore, Editor ALIR, c/- Australian Clearing House for Library and Information Science (ACHLIS), University of South Australia Library, St Bernards Road, Magill SA 5072, ph (08) 302 4439, fax (08) 302 4695.

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