

## Seeking opportunities



**Helen Tait**

ALIA president

I am sure that every incoming ALIA president must come to the writing of this first column with a sense of shock that the year is upon them. It seems only yesterday that a vice-presidential nomination was submitted and people were using phrases like 'tiger for punishment' in contemplating the prospect of the roles of biennial conference committee convenor and ALIA president in the same year.

Maybe the problem is that I am still as naïve now as I was then, but I am greatly looking forward to the biennial conference in Melbourne in October as a highlight of the coming year. We have an enthusiastic organising committee, an excellent conference organiser and I am sure that you will agree that we have a rich and varied program when you see the registration brochures in two months time. We are looking forward to a large attendance and will be doing our best to ensure a centennial conference to remember.

### **The public libraries conference**

The conference which I have most recently attended was the Public Libraries conference in Sydney in November. The very high standard of presentations and the depth and clarity of coverage of a wide range of key issues for the future of public libraries made me feel very proud of my colleagues. It struck me that those librarians who had brought their local government managers or councillors with them must have felt pleased about the image of the library world they would take away.

A key feature was the outward focus of the conference. Hearing from speakers from parallel professions and non-librarians engaged on a range of projects with libraries helps us to put our role and efforts in a wider context. An international perspective was ably provided by keynote speaker Peter Young, executive director of the US National Council for Library and Information Services, who was not sure whether to be pleased or sorry that he was on the other side of the world during the government appropriation crisis.

Peter was a very generous contributor throughout the conference, as well as to the strategic planning day which followed, at which he cheerfully introduced himself as an unemployed federal bureaucrat.

### **Being outwardly focused**

I believe that it should be ALIA's role to consciously and continually maintain our outward focus: to be up-to-date with, and to play a leading role in, the technological developments which will shape our future; to be aware of others in the fields in which we work — as potential competitors, but more particularly as potential allies and strategic partners; to seek opportunities to represent library and information needs and interests and present a positive image of the library sector. The *Lobby for libraries* program, developed by Virginia Walsh, which is designed to develop and extend lobbying and presentation skills throughout the Association will be a valuable tool, both for individuals representing their own career interests or planning campaigns for their own libraries, and for the Association's ongoing nationwide efforts.

### **Are you prepared for the federal election?**

In 1996 the nationwide effort will include a Federal election, a great opportunity to coax some specific undertakings out of the generally positive words on libraries and information put out by all major parties, and an opportunity to draw local issues to the attention of your local community and local member of parliament. We should be building good positive contacts in every electorate while they need us — we never know when we will need them. ALIA Branch committees will be organising teams to target each federal electorate. Don't be nervous about taking part. There will be plenty of assistance in developing key elements of the approach in each area, and ALIA colleagues to work alongside for mutual support.

### **Ensuring that we have effective forums**

Change and progress in the library and information world is happening so fast that the only thing I can be sure of looking forward to in 1996 is that there will be important issues for ALIA that we have not even thought of yet. My efforts will be directed to trying to ensure we have effective forums for debate and opportunities to show leadership — wherever it turns out to be needed. I look forward to working with all ALIA office-holders and members to make sure that we make the most of all our opportunities in the coming year. ■

*Change and progress is happening so fast that there will be important issues for ALIA that we have not even thought of yet...*