

# The 1996 federal election

A synopsis of the outcome, by Virginia Walsh, ALIA executive director

**M**alcolm Mackerras predicted a Coalition win by 30 seats at the Federal election on 2 March. Other psephologists considerably underestimated the size of what prime minister Howard referred to as his 'powerful mandate' on election night — a 46-plus seat majority in the House of Representatives. Paul Keating's visionary, 'big-picture' appeals to the electors were not sufficient to reverse the perceived need for change. One newspaper headline, in *The Weekend Australian* of 9–10 March dubbed it 'Paul Keating's fatal abstraction'.

Analysing the reasons for the election outcome (and justifying why it was too hard to pick) is now the most popular parlour game in Canberra. Many of the pollsters picked the margin of the swing against Labor but failed to predict the quantum of seats that would change political hands. Press Gallery journalists demonstrated how out-of-touch they are with wider community sentiment. Such reflection can be quite stimulating (if you work in the political hothouse of Canberra). Perhaps of greater immediate value is an analysis of what we can expect from the new Coalition government. Some of the key elements in such an analysis relate to factors such as difficulties associated with the management of a large Coalition backbench, the fact that only two of the new ministers have had ministerial experience, the impact of the large number of Coalition women sitting in the House and other factors more difficult to immediately assess such as the fate of 'political correctness'. How will Labor perform in opposition given the loss of such a large number of experienced politicians, including eight former ministers who lost their seats?

Finally, we must not overlook the Senate. While the election outcome in the Upper House will not be finalised for some time, what is already clear is that the Coalition will not have a majority and will need to establish alliances with the minor parties to achieve some of its advertised reforms — most particularly the proposed sale of Telstra. How accurate then is prime minister Howard's claim of a 'powerful mandate'? Modest and dignified in his acceptance speech, we can assume that John Howard is well aware of the challenges confronting his government in spite of (and because of) his spectacular 'win'.

In the wake of the election hurly-burly the new government has moved to reorganise the bureaucracy, appoint the ministry and shuffle departmental secretaries, some of whom are now looking for alternative job opportunities.

The task ahead for Associations such as ours is to develop our advocacy strategies in the context of the new policy environment and to undertake a program of briefings of those individuals who will be most influential in those areas of relevance to our constituency. Our meeting with senator Richard Alston during the election campaign marks the commencement of this process. Senator Alston held the position of shadow minister for communications and the arts in the Coalition Opposition and, it was in that capacity that a delegation from ALIA provided a briefing for the senator at Parliament House in late February. Senator Alston has now been confirmed as minister for communications and the arts and we are confident that the new minister has a good appreciation of the important rôle of libraries in all sectors. The implementation of a Coalition promise of \$11.4 million to fund community access to on-line information has already been the subject of discussion. We will find further opportunities to meet with the minister to keep him informed of library issues and we will be meeting with others in the new government as well.

In this edition of *inCite* we provide an overview of Coalition policy statements of relevance to the library and information sector. In future editions we will look in more detail at these policies and address some of the more unexpected by-products of the election including the rôle of women in the Parliament and the perceived erosion of 'political correctness' and its impact on policy development. We will also feature profiles of some new ministers, Coalition backbenchers and Labor members. As Tim Fischer, the new deputy prime minister and leader of the Na-

## Coalition policies

A number of key policies released during the election campaign are of relevance to the library sector. These include:

- For art's sake: A fair go!*
- On-line Australia*
- Better communications*
- Coalition higher education policy*
- Coalition policy on education for schools and TAFE*
- Liberal and National Parties' local government policy*
- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander affairs policy*
- Opportunities and choice for women*
- Pathways to real jobs*
- Better pay for better work*
- Meeting our commitments (media release)*

tional Party, has said frequently of late, 'watch this space'.

What follows is a summary of issues of relevance to the library sector within each of the key policy documents.

#### **Access to on-line information.**

- \$10 million has been promised to assist in the cost of digitising the national collection for a National Cultural Network, so that all Australians can have instant on-line access to our galleries, museums and other heritage collections.
- \$11.4 million has been set aside to enable public libraries and similar institutions to function as community access points for on-line services such as the National Cultural Network.

#### **Telecommunications**

- The government will require Telstra to provide ISDN digital access services and a fully-digitised system of exchanges by 1 July 1997.
- ISDN charges have been promised to be brought under a price-cap régime from 1 July 1996, and this price will be monitored against world benchmarks.
- There will be a maintenance of existing price-caps, the existence of untimed local calls, and targeted assistance for low income earners.
- One-third of Telstra will be sold to fund Coalition spending promises.

#### **Copyright**

- Various statements by the Coalition support the introduction of 'a broad-based technology-neutral transmission right designed to ensure that content providers obtain a fair return for their commitment'.
- The recommendations of the Copyright Law Review Committee 'will be promptly assessed ... [and] new copyright legislation will be drafted in consultation with industry and the arts community.'
- The Coalition will extend the fair-dealing principle to new media such as on-line services.

#### **On-line content regulation**

- The Coalition government will seek to develop international agreement, facilitating the establishment of an on-line code of practice, encouraging the States to take a uniform approach to content, encourage community awareness and foster education programs.
- In several policy statements, the Coalition promises to help regulate on-line content

in consultation with 'the community, the on-line industry, and the States and Territories'.

#### **Information Policy Task Force**

- The IPTF is promised to be similar to the National Information Services Council in that it will be an advisory committee which is supported by a secretariat in the Department of Communications and the Arts.
- It will be made up of 'professionals with established expertise in the application of new technology to service delivery and the impact of technology on regulation, society and commerce'. Groups to be approached include education, health, legal and library professionals, as well as community, industry and user groups.

#### **EdNA**

- The Coalition will 'complete and test EdNA' to ensure inter-network compatibility, particularly between EdNA and the state-based educational networks. However, the document stresses that the primary responsibility for the delivery of educational services remains with the States.
- The Coalition also states that they will facilitate, rather than provide, access through a tendering process, though it will seek to negotiate common rates for metropolitan and rural areas.

#### **Higher education**

- The Coalition states that a primary goal is to ensure student access to higher education.
- There is explicit support for the development of a national strategic approach to university library infrastructure.
- The policy promises to maintain the level of funding in terms of operating grants.
- There is support given for the further development of regional universities.

#### **Schools and TAFE**

- The policy promises to maintain the National Professional Development Program for teachers.
- \$60 million has been set aside to address the needs of rural students.
- The coalition seeks to develop a national plan for TAFE.

#### **Women in education**

- The coalition wishes to place emphasis on quality, diversity and access for women to non-traditional courses.

*continued next page...*



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## Publications received

Flesch, J 1995 *Love brought to book: a bio-bibliography of 20th century Australian romance novels*, Melbourne: National Centre for Australian Studies. Contains biographical details of Australian authors of 20th century romance novels and bibliographies of their work. Also contains essays on the genre. RRP \$19.95 plus \$3 p&p. xxiv + 43pp. B5. PB. ISBN 0 7326 0602 0. Available from Publications, National Centre for Australian Studies, Monash University, Wellington Road, Clayton 3168.

McMaster, MJ Ed. 1995 *Indexers and partners in publishing: Proceedings from the first international conference*. [Melbourne]: Australian Society of Indexers. Over 30 papers covering many aspects of indexing, including pricing, standards, legal indexing, use of indexing software, language control, ethics of indexing, indexing new media, indexing the Internet and training of indexers. Price not quoted. v + 214 pp. A4. Index. ISBN 0 64625050 7. Available from The Australian Society of Indexers, PO Box 1251, Melbourne 3001.

Nicholson, F and Rochester (eds), M 1996 *Best practice: challenges in library management education*. Adelaide: Auslib Press. This publication 'aims to assist library and information managers to educate themselves and their staff to undertake emerging management roles'. It contains 17 papers covering quality management, OH&S, competency standards, financial management, project management and other management topics. 140 pp. A4. PB. \$34 plus \$6 p&p. Bibliographies. ISBN 1 875145 39 7. Available from Auslib Press, PO Box 622, Blackwood 5051.

### Employment and training.

- The government states that its goal is to produce full employment.
- It seeks to modernise the Apprenticeship and Training System.
- As a priority, the government seeks the development of a regional and community employment strategy.

### Performing arts multimedia library

- In collaboration with the states and the private sector, the Coalition promises to establish a 'Performing arts multimedia library', with \$0.7 million being made available towards the cost of the recording and digitisation of a number of key theatrical, musical, dramatic and other 'performances of excellence'.

### Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander issues

- The Coalition has promised to ensure direct involvement of indigenous peoples in the decision making process.
- The new Federal government seeks to develop memoranda of understanding between local government and other authorities to avoid inefficiencies.
- There is a promise to review all Commonwealth programs for indigenous students, so that their relevance and their educational outcomes can be assessed.
- The government will attempt to ensure that indigenous peoples have a greater voice in determining their educational needs.
- Abstudy will be maintained.
- The *Racial Discrimination Act* will be respected.
- The Coalition will continue to support CDEP, with qualification.

### Industrial relations

- The award system will be retained but awards will be simplified.
- Where parties choose to, they may move

outside awards to collective or individual agreements.

- New, non-union *Australian Workplace Agreements (AWAs)* will be a central part of the policy; these must include a range of minimum standards.
- The rôle of the Industrial Relations Commission in certifying agreements will be minimised, but a new *Office of the Employment Advocate* will be created to deal with complaints about agreements.
- Unfair dismissal laws will be substantially modified but to date there is no indication of what precise form amendments will take.
- A strong attack on so-called 'compulsory unionism' will be a central feature of the policy; including the outlawing of 'closed shop' arrangements and removal of union preference clauses from particular awards and agreements.
- The Government will co-operate with the States to remove duplication and complexity; and complementary legislation by the States will be sought.

### Funding measures

(Note: All figures are the triennial totals)

#### New spending:

- \$0.7 million for the Multimedia Library.
- \$11.4 million for public library access to the Internet.
- \$10.0 million for the National Cultural Network.
- \$45.0 million increase for Austudy.

#### Spending reductions:

- \$985.0 million reduction in information technology spending.
- \$171.3 million reduction in higher education discretionary funding.
- \$111.0 million reduction in training review sub-program of Vocational Education and training.
- \$80.0 million from *Building better cities*. ■

## Index of advertisers in this issue

ACLIS Audiovisual Subcommittee	15	Microtag Pty Ltd	23
ALIA Manager of the Year Award	29	National Library of Australia	36
ALIA Library Tech. of the Year Award	29	Rims Australia	6
Charles Sturt University	32	Sanderson Computers	35
Data Research International Pty Ltd	2	Saraband Music	15
DNA Integrated Communications	9	Sirsi	13
DW Thorpe	11	The Write Response	17
Geac Global Information	5	Trimagic Software	25
Ferntree Software Services	23	University of Technology Sydney	6
Freelance Library & Information Services	19	Zenith Management Services Group	25
Library Locums	11		