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ALIA — a web of library and information specialists

Last month I travelled to Queensland to meet with ALIA members in Cairns, Townsville, Rockhampton, Bundaberg, Gladstone, Mackay, Emerald and Brisbane. It was an opportunity to canvass many issues and, importantly, it was a reminder of the geographical spread of our Association — the web of individuals who comprise our Association.

As we approach Australian Library Week — with the theme *Libraries: a web of information* — it is fitting that we reflect for a moment on the relevance of our own network within the Australian library community.

Our Association represents a diversity of regional and special interests which is remarkably disparate — while also sharing a multitude of common interests. With over 8000 members organised into 105 Divisions spread over a continent which covers eight million square kilometres, it is critical that the underpinning organisational structure is financially sound and managed efficiently. It is critical that the Association's General Council supported by the staff at the ALIA National Office, provide leadership in, and co-ordination of, all the special interests and concerns of the membership. All members elected to positions of office in our Divisions also have a vital role in this regard.

These matters of leadership and co-ordination have been the subject of a recent study conducted for ALIA, the Australian Council of Libraries and Information Services (ACLIS) and the National Library of Australia by Canberra consultant Robert Gardini. During this review process ALIA's General Council considered the options available to provide the most-effective leadership into the next century and proposed to the consultant that it is desirable to have a single peak body representing the sector. It is in our best interests to seek the most-appropriate organisational arrangement to promote the library sector and provide a range of services that our members require. The consultant's report will provide the basis for all of us to determine how that can best be done.

No organisation with representation and co-ordination responsibilities can afford to

be complacent about its performance. There are always new aspirations which guide our evolution. But any developments must be contained within the financial and human resources which can be accessed. The resources which could be harnessed through the emergence of one peak organisation will boost our capacity to meet the needs of the library and information sector. Importantly, the demands on the individuals who comprise the ALIA and ACLIS committees across the country could be rationalised to provide a more-efficient use of the voluntary hours devoted to the interests of our sector.

The report of the consultant can be expected to provide some direction for the future development of all Associations representing the library sector and we look forward to the debates which will flow from the consultant's recommendations.

In March, General Council endorsed a new strategic plan which enunciates the goals of our Association over the next five years. These goals are flexible and will be subject to continuous assessment. The new plan, like the consultant's review, is part of the process of organisational revision which has characterised the library community over the last one hundred years. My trip to Queensland served as a reminder of the great enthusiasm among our members (and prospective members) to tackle the current concerns and help shape a creative and flexible future for our community.

If there is one particular activity which could be singled out for greater priority in our sector, it is the need to promote ourselves to the broader community in a more effective manner. In general there remains a lack of appreciation of the information management skills of the library worker and we need to highlight those particular characteristics which differentiate the information professional from those working in related fields. The achievements, and pride in those achievements, of the profession need to be promoted to the influence holders and decision makers in our workplaces, our governments and in the broader community. Australian Library Week is an excellent opportunity for such promotion. ■

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