

Prospects for the year



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1996 ended with the disappointing news of the demise of the WORLD 1 project. This joint initiative of the National Libraries of Australia and New Zealand was ambitious in design, complexity and cost and would have represented an outstanding achievement in the event that it could have been brought to fruition. It is hoped that much of the developmental work associated with WORLD 1 can be directed towards the goal of facilitating global on-line document search facilities through alternative mechanisms. I understand this remains a fundamental commitment of the National Library of Australia. The library is not commenting about the reasons for the failure of this project until certain legal negotiations are concluded. It will be interesting to see what director-general, Warren Horton, has to say.

Copyright

1997 will be a year of considerable challenge for all in the library sector with many opportunities and threats directly linked to the new communications technologies. A good example of this emerged in the lead up to the World Intellectual Property Organisation meetings in Geneva in December where issues such as fair dealing and the status of electronic 'copies' were on the agenda. Jamie Wodetzki, who was a member of the International Federation of Library Associations (IFLA) team, has reported that libraries fared well in the end. We will be providing a more detailed report from Jamie soon.

Federal communications initiatives

Of considerable interest are the many inquiries into information technology and telecommunications. ALIA recently completed submissions to the Standard Telephone Service Review Group and the Telecommunication Access Public Inquiry. In the January *inCite* I reported on the On-line Public Access Initiative and foreshadowed funding opportunities for public libraries. On 5 December the Minister for Communications and the Arts, Senator Richard Alston, announced that some of the proceeds of the sale of Telstra would be applied to a Regional Telecommunications Infrastructure Fund (RTIF) which seeks to aid projects designed to 'improve the quality of telecommunications infrastructure in rural and regional areas'. Funds of \$50 million are to be made available each year over five years from 1997-98. Alston's Department will provide a secretariat for a Board of three to five people who will administer the grants. More details will be provided as they become available.

The RTIF announcement claims that a broad objective of the program is to 'provide rural and regional communities with additional employment opportunities, increase the amount and quality of training services, increase access for schools to advanced communications services and electronic information sources, and provide better quality communications and information services for regional businesses.' Where exactly

do libraries stand in relation to all this government interest in the potential benefits of improved telecommunications infrastructure? We believe that we must continue to assert the central role of libraries in the management and distribution of information and will continue therefore to respond to these inquiries through the year.

ALIA/ACLIS/NLA review

I am delighted that we can start this year with the announcement that the 'Strategic review of library co-ordination and representation' is underway. The Steering Committee of Warren Horton (NLA), Helen Tait (ALIA) and Helen Hayes (ACLIS) has appointed Robert Gardini & Associates to undertake this important task. This issue of *inCite* carries more detailed information about the review including details about the consultant's schedule of visits to the capital cities for consultations and the mechanisms for making written submissions. Libraries are well-respected institutions in our community but we know that we must work hard to ensure their future. This review will go some way towards helping us to better represent the interests of our sector. Please give some consideration to your thoughts on this issue and provide some comments to Mr Gardini.

Cultural Ministers' Council

The Council met on 17 December in Canberra and the Ministers endorsed the Libraries Working Group (LWG) final report 2020 Vision. Information about availability of the report will be provided in *inCite* as soon as it is available. The report draws on the work of the earlier consultancies and work undertaken directly by the LWG which resulted in a number of publications including *Bushtrack to superhighway* and *Navigating the economy of knowledge*. It has been agreed that the major tasks assigned to the LWG are now completed and a smaller group has been established to follow up the final report. As a member of that group I look forward to providing further reports, in greater detail, about the direction forward.

New ALIA membership database

Finally I must report on the development and installation of the new database. This new system has caused delays in the issuing of 1997 renewal notices and I apologise if this has caused any anxiety to our members. It represents a major change in the way we manage information about our members and, importantly, it will give us much greater flexibility in the entry and retrieval of information. As must be expected, a change of this magnitude creates some upheavals, and our membership staff are working assiduously to complete this process with the minimum of disruption. Members will note a change in the renewal format. Please assist us by completing the new forms as quickly as possible and returning them to ALIA National Office. We would be grateful for any feedback on the new system and I thank you for your patience. ■