

Advocacy

... a priority for the ALIA national office



Virginia Walsh

Executive director

In a recent survey ALIA members indicated that advocacy is an important priority for our Association. Indeed, representing the interests of the library and information sector to governments, to employers and to the community is a key feature of much of the ALIA national office activity and also an important element of activity in our divisions. In recent weeks we have participated in a Senate inquiry into online content regulation, met with the Internet Industry Association (which is developing a code of conduct for Internet service providers), celebrated Australian Library Week and revised our advocacy skills training program *Lobby for libraries*. At the March ALIA General Council meeting we held a three-hour forum with branch presidents and general councillors on our Federal Election Strategy.

In preparation for the Queensland state election I travelled to Brisbane during May to meet with Branch members and help formulate an advocacy program. Later this month a team from ALIA, including president John Shipp, will be travelling to Washington to participate in the world's biggest library conference where, with the assistance of federal government funding through the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade and with the support of the National Library of Australia, ALIA is co-ordinating an Australian presence at the trade exhibition. All of these activities represent our commitment to raising the profile of our sector and, most importantly, to ensuring that specific matters of relevance such as censorship, copyright, privacy, status of the profession and employment terms and conditions are effectively tackled.

Lobby for libraries

This program, which we have been delivering as a seminar program for over four years, recognises that, to be successful lobbyists, we cannot rely on one or two individuals. Successful advocacy demands that we are all actively involved. To do this we require some special skills including the capacity to clearly identify issues, propose solutions and deliver an effective campaign. The program has been updated to include more recent lobbying material and also to provide guidelines for instructors. It is now proposed that the kit will be distributed to participants in advance of the seminars, that the program will be conducted over two sessions when possible (two afternoons or evenings) and that the more extensive notes for instructors will enable delivery by a greater number of our more experienced members. The program also aims to equip members to be better advocates for their own libraries and careers.

Advance planning is necessary if you would like to program a *Lobby for libraries* seminar in your workplace or region. The optimum number of participants is around fifteen. Contact the ALIA national office for more information.

ALA conference

The American Library Association conference will be held in Washington in late June. It attracts about 25 000 delegates and has an exhibition space of breathtaking proportions. ALIA has a large stand and will be promoting, under the banner *Australian libraries: pathways to knowledge*, Australian library scholarship, bibliographic databases, ALIA conferences, library promotion campaigns and our libraries. The ALA has its headquarters in Chicago but maintains an advocacy office in Washington in close proximity to the Capitol. While in Washington I will be speaking at an international forum on advocacy and attending the seminar program *Library advocacy now!* which has aims similar to our *Lobby for libraries*. While it is hoped that our presence at the ALA event will further enhance our international standing, the greatest utility derives from the opportunity to exchange ideas and thus advance our own advocacy efforts.

The ALIA International Relations Committee (IRC) met in Canberra during April and endorsed this activity in Washington. The IRC also identified a number of opportunities to assist libraries and library associations in our region. A report on these initiatives will appear in *inCite* later this year.

Federal electoral strategy

A federal election could be held at any time from July this year until early in 1999. At the time of writing it is difficult to predict the likelihood of the election date depending as it does on the success of the May budget, the tax reform package (to be announced sometime soon after the budget), the resolution of the waterfront situation and the so-called 'Asian meltdown'. Consequently we are planning for a number of different scenarios for our election lobbying program. At the very least we hope to be able to target key individuals and electorates. Our message will be essentially to promote an understanding of the important role of libraries in the digital information revolution. Thus, when matters such as censorship of the Internet, fair dealing in copyright materials and funding for libraries arise, our federal politicians will already be generally familiar with our concerns.

Internet Industry Association

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► vide Internet connection services (such as those ALIA provides though ALIANet) face the difficult task of convincing some politicians and community groups that the responsibility for the information that is accessed must lie with the service user and the content provider. In the case of children using Internet services in libraries, that responsibility must be assumed by parents and guardians. Just as librarians cannot be held responsible for the welfare of children left unsupervised in libraries as a substitute for after-school care, librarians cannot supervise all the information which may be viewed on the Internet by young users. Similarly, if we provide Internet access to ALIA members though ALIANet, we cannot be held responsible for the information which might be transmitted using our bandwidth. To prosecute service providers for the material which is accessed though their services is the equivalent of suing Australia Post for illegal material which is conveyed by mail.

Therefore we are developing a strategic alliance with the Internet Industry Association which will assist us in tackling these issues in the future.

1998 Federal Budget

A regular feature of our annual calendar is the provision of a budget report to our members. Our report on the 12 May budget is included in this issue.

Our relations with our politicians are important in securing influence in the political process. Arts Minister Senator Richard Alston's support for Australian Library Week which was graphically featured on the cover of the April *inCite* is part of this process. It was heartening to receive a number of other demonstrations of support from state and territory ministers which were organised by ALIA branches.

We should also note the recent announcement by the federal government that copyright law reform will include fair dealing rights for digital copy similar to those available in the hard copy format. This outcome owes a great deal to the excellent representations over the last few years by the ACLIS copyright officer. We look forward to continuing and enhancing our advocacy work as the merger with ACLIS proceeds. ■

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