

AGPS is dead: long live AusInfo?

Peter Clayton, ALIA representative and chair of the AusInfo-ACLIS Liaison Committee, which met on 1 May 1998

The Australian Government Publishing Service (AGPS), established as a result of the 1964 *Erwin report* with a charter of responsibility for Commonwealth printing and publishing, is no more. Many of its printing and publishing functions have been outsourced. Others — such as responsibility for publishing by Commonwealth departmental and agency material — have been devolved to individual agencies. The few remaining functions are now with its successor, AusInfo, a division of the new Department of Finance and Administration. Some idea of the scale of this downsizing can be gained from staffing figures: cut from over 300 to a present 35. The draft charter of the new organisation stresses responsibility for the dissemination and management of government information, but not printing and publishing.

Of most importance to the library profession is bibliographic control. AusInfo believes that, once departments and agencies had heard that AGPS had disappeared, they assumed that all its bibliographic functions had disappeared with it. AusInfo have commenced a series of visits to government departments and agencies, stressing the need for the provision of bibliographic data and sets of publications for deposit libraries.

Via the AusInfo Internet home page, a much-improved database of government publications is now available at http://www.fed.gov.au/n_index13.htm. An earlier version of this, mounted outside the departmental firewall, was almost

impossible to search successfully and infrequently updated. A 'secure tunnel' has been dug through the firewall, and a new Webpak database provides enormously increased functionality (albeit with some remaining shortcomings, of which AusInfo are acutely aware — and about which they will welcome feedback). Government publication bibliographic data are also now shared with the library community through AusInfo membership of ABN.

AusInfo still intends resumption of publication of the fortnightly list, in both print and electronic formats (however, this was also promised nearly a year ago — it has been three years since it last appeared).

AusInfo remains responsible for GOLD and the Commonwealth Directory, and for the library deposit scheme. AusInfo staff are working with OGIT and the National Library on the new single entry point for the Commonwealth government [<http://www.fed.gov.au/>]. AusInfo is also still responsible for standards and the *Style manual*; a new, alphabetically arranged *Little book of style* was launched recently and work is proceeding on electronic style guidelines, but publication of the sixth edition of the *Style manual* itself has been postponed. AGPS Press has gone.

AusInfo gives the impression of a much-reduced organisation whose library business, once largely peripheral, is now of proportionally increased importance. Whether it has the staffing resources, and the administrative clout, to fulfil its changed mission remains to be seen. ■

Australian Library and Information Association

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