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This structural change should provide for a more flexible and nimble Association, with better support for members and the ability to respond to the changing demands of our industry...

Where do we want to go?

Following on from the last issue of *inCite*, where this column went into some detail on the incorporation process, I would like to report on the next stage of the renewal process. Diligent readers will remember that the renewal process has essentially been broken into two stages — the first stage was incorporation under the Corporations Law. This step is well on the way, and by early 2000 we will be operating as an incorporated body. This is of little consequence (and probably of little interest!) to most of our 8000 members, at least in the short term. It does, however give us greater flexibility for the future.

Of much greater interest to all members will be the structural changes which will be occurring in 2000. By way of background, there are currently 120 sub-groups (or divisions) of the Association. Some of these are geographically based (such as the state and territory branches), some are national sectorial groups (such as the Health Libraries Section), some are regional sectorial groups (such as the NSW Information Sciences Section). The only common factor to this multiplicity of sub-groups is that they have grown over time, and not to an organised plan. In itself, this is not a problem — some would argue that such organic growth is natural, and a sign of organisational health.

Others, however, would argue that it is time to review this structure, especially in view of the rapidly changing environment we all work within. There are undoubtedly some problems with this structure. For instance our accounting staff have 120 sets of accounts to consolidate each year. This is time consuming, and the input of 120 treasurers involves a large number of ALIA members in book keeping duties.

More importantly, the large number of sub-groups can make the Association seem unwieldy — especially to a newcomer, or an outsider. It can mean that tasks are left undone because everyone assumes that another section will be taking care of a specific area (for instance, who is actively working to encourage web page developers to join ALIA right now? Should this be done by RAISS, state sections, or someone else?). There can also be an overlap of tasks — similar training events are sometimes held by two different groups, within the same state.

Points eight and nine in the *Charter of Renewal* (<http://www.alia.org.au/review/charter/charter.of.renewal.html>) specifically mandate: (8) 'That a new model of administrative and financial support for ALIA's branches be developed'; and (9) 'That the structure and operation of ALIA divisions be reviewed'. The next stage of the renewal process will follow up on these two items.

Given the commitment which members have to the groups in which they are active, this step will require a high degree of consultation. A divisional structure working group has been formed. This group, which includes representatives from a range of states and industry sectors, will table a report at the October General Council meeting. This report will include a range of options. Following the October meeting, broader consultation with the membership will take place — an options paper will be sent to all divisional groups, and comments will be sought.

These comments will be gathered by the Divisional Working Group in the first quarter of 2000. The working group will report back to the Board of Directors by April 2000. The new structure will be progressively implemented through the last six months of 2000.

Some of the issues which this group is looking at include the levels of activity of the different groups, the level of financial support needed, optimal representation on a national level, and the influence of geography on the structure.

Some will argue that the timeline is too long, and that we can make changes much more quickly. Counter to that however, is the fact that these changes are, in many ways, more critical to the future success of the organisation, as they affect many more members more directly than any other item in the *Charter of Renewal*.

This structural change should provide for a more flexible and nimble Association, with better support for members and the ability to respond to the changing demands of our industry. Once the discussion paper is released divisions should start thinking about future needs and structures. We have a world of choices available to us — this is the time to think broadly, as well as deeply about where we want to go, and how to get there ■