

The past is a foreign country...



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LP Hartley said 'The past is a foreign country, they do things differently there.' (*The Go-betweens*). Writing my last Frontline, I believe that quote from Hartley will become a catch-cry for ALIA in the future. As is customary in a final column, I would like to review (at least briefly) the past year — but I would also like to look ahead.

The year has been a busy one for the Association. In the past twelve months, we have appointed a new executive director, made a decision to go into an incorporation process, and made a firm commitment to, as well as progress on, a complete review of the Association's structure.

Any living organism is growing and changing constantly — 1999 has been a year where no-one could doubt that the Association is alive. I have visited members all around the country. Each visit impressed me once more with the energy, interest, vitality and professional focus of our members. On a personal level, I would like to thank everyone that I have met in my travels and at meetings over the past year for their gracious hospitality.

However interesting and busy 1999 was, I am sure that 2000 will be even more challenging. We have unparalleled opportunities ahead of us. If there are members who felt that the Association moved too quickly on incorporation, they will feel even more challenged by the next stage of the renewal process — divisional restructure.

The divisional restructure is truly a time of high risk and high reward. There is a risk that the wrong sort of restructure will result in reduced member numbers, subsequently requiring either increased dues, or decreased services — neither outcome is desired. What would be even more disappointing would be a restructure which did not encourage local member involvement and participation. The Association will, and always has, relied on the interest and enthusiasm of individual members to carry out many of its objectives.

Obviously 'practice standards' (including course accreditation), lobbying and issues such as copyright will always have to be dealt with as national issues, with a professional national office staff. But these are only a subset of what ALIA 'really does'. ALIA's real strength is in the local activities, networking, training, support, and advocacy which happen on a local level. In Victoria alone, over 100 ALIA activities

were held in 1999 — an impressive number by anyone's standard.

The vast majority of these were put together by local members, working in their own time, on topics of local interest. We cannot replicate that energy and enthusiasm on a national level — what we can do is put into place structures which support, encourage and assist local groups in local work (while maintaining a national focus).

The 'high reward' element will come about through the ability to form an Association which is even more responsive to member needs than it has been in the past — an Association which can move quickly, and effectively lead our industry.

A critical element in ALIA's future will be a renewed growth in membership. We need more members so that new and expanded services can be offered, while dues are held constant, or lowered. The only effective way to do this is to expand member numbers. National office, and the new Board of Directors will be looking at member recruitment and retention as a matter of priority.

An additional opportunity and threat is the GST — especially as it applies to the interlibrary loans voucher system. The threat is contained in the implications of GST for the system — this will be covered elsewhere. For now, it should suffice to say that Mr Howard was not thinking about the impact of a GST on interlibrary loans traffic when the legislation was created! The opportunity is provided through the lobbying, clarification, training and administration (read 'leadership') ALIA can provide to the industry on this complex and critical issue.

I am optimistic that next year will be a successful one for ALIA — with Mairéad Browne as president, a newly-constituted Board of Directors, the first National Policy Congress, and an incorporated body in place, we will have the necessary flexibility and drive to create an ALIA which can grow and thrive in the future.

In closing, I would like to thank everyone who has supported me over the past twelve months — the ALIA national office staff, ALIA members around the country, my co-workers at Yarra Plenty, and especially my wife Margie and son Jonas who have been more than patient. It has been a most rewarding and exciting year for me. I look forward to more change, and a bigger, better ALIA in 2000. ■

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