

Looking backwards, looking forwards...



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This has been a year of putting in place the building blocks for the new Association. We have confirmed our name, reviewed and modified our Objects, and prepared our new Constitution for incorporation under *Corporations law*. The requirements for the voluntary liquidation of the Association's assets and their transfer to the new organisation are being set in place.

Our efforts have not just been focussed on organisational matters. Our divisions have continued to lead the way with activities and programs for members at the grass roots level. The Information Science, TAFE, Public Libraries, Special and Health Libraries, Library Technicians, Reference and Information Services, Cataloguers and Local Studies Sections have held successful conferences that offered great professional development opportunities. At the national level, we have been particularly involved in advocating our position on the GST, copyright and online-content regulation legislation.

One of the most personally rewarding and professionally inspiring events this year was to be invited to join Fellows from New South Wales and the ACT at the Fellows Lunch hosted by our past president John Shipp in November. Their collective years of membership of over half a millennium and across three association structures illustrate the ability of our organisation to adapt to changing needs. This, and the professional excellence evident within our sector, provides great promise for our future.

Even without Y2K inventiveness and movies, 2000 offers a great deal of activity in our restructuring, relations with other organisations, and in policy development.

Membership

A high priority is to turn around the declining membership over the last few years. A number of recruitment and retention initiatives are being pursued. Like many other associations, service groups, unions and even churches we are currently operating in an environment of declining membership brought about by competing demands on time and different generational attitudes. We need to find new reasons for joining and ways to belong; what would convince prospective members to join, and stay. Through some re-organisation in ALIA national office we are creating a position for someone with the marketing and promotion skills to work closely with our membership to prepare and implement strategic marketing plans for growth, undertake product and services review and development to better target benefits for our current and future personal and institutional membership.

In response to feedback from many members, the membership year will move to the financial year. This month, membership renewals will be issued for the period 1 January to 30 June 2000. In May/June 2000 a further renewal invoice will be

issued for the July 2000 to June 2001 period. A goods and services tax (GST) will apply to membership fees and subscriptions from 1 July 2000.

The Executive Committee is keen to make the procedures for joining more accessible — and so requirements and electronic forms are being investigated. The ALIA Board of Education has prepared a discussion paper on changing our membership categories to more-closely resemble those of other associations and is seeking comments by 17 March 2000. The paper has been distributed to all divisions, and is available on our website or from ALIA national office. Generally, the changes provide for a shift from our current emphasis on entry-level qualifications to an emphasis on recognition of continuing and current knowledge. Some of the key changes are the new continuing professional development (CPD) program that commences in 2000, a category for the experienced practitioner, widening our technician and associate membership categories to include qualifications recognised by allied organisations, a new self-nominating category for Fellowship, and consequently changing the awarded Fellowship to Distinguished Fellow.

Divisions

A comprehensive consultation paper offering six models for divisional restructure has been distributed to divisions and is available on our website or from ALIA national office. Comments are requested by 17 March 2000. The Divisional Structure Subcommittee established by General Council prepared the paper, and in doing so were cognisant of the need to widen the opportunities for members to contribute expertise through mechanisms other than divisional committees, such as through topical expert and advisory groups.

National Policy Congress

The Constitution of the new Association includes a reference to the National Policy Congress. In determining the format, General Council agreed that the Congress will be an important consultative mechanism that ensures members have input into the policy-making process. Issues to be considered at the first meeting (April or May 2000) include the revised division structure, Association By-laws, accreditation of library services, and the GST.

Every division will be entitled to nominate one representative who will have voting rights. Individual members and representatives from other organisations may attend the Congress but will not have voting rights. Those divisions not able to have a representative attend may vote by proxy. Supplementary funding to assist nominated representatives of divisions to attend the Congress will be available. The two institutional members of General Council (Janette Wright and Ruth McIntyre) will attend the first Congress and have voting rights.

Each nominated divisional representative will

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vote in the election of the two directors to be elected to the Board of Directors by the National Policy Congress. This will normally be undertaken through a postal ballot at the same time as elections for other directors. All directors should be personal members of the Association and would represent the interests of the organisation as a whole rather than those of a particular constituency.

The ALIA president will not chair the Congress; this position instead being filled by a distinguished member of the Association.

Goods and services tax

The GST will have a significant impact on the Association's activities. It has been estimated that the GST will add two to three per cent to the Association's costs. We are in the process of implementing the necessary accounting recording and reporting systems, and developing guidelines and advice on the management of the GST for those within the Association offering relevant goods or services, for example conferences, CPD activities, and publications.

A proposal for the operation of the voucher system across the sector is being developed and will be discussed widely. Our member GST information service is being updated constantly so keep checking ALIANet or contact ALIA national office.

Policy development

The Association is planning some exciting initiatives that aim to enhance cohesion and co-operation within our sector and with allied organisations. We are working with a number of organisations to develop a proposal for a Collaborative Research Cen-

tre which builds on the technological developments of information technology and resources to investigate the social and economic aspects of access to electronic information.

We are preparing advocacy programs on the library and information services sector's role in the democratisation of information and knowledge. As a part of this we have prepared a background paper on government funding initiatives in the United States, Great Britain, Canada, Europe and Australia. From this we are developing strategies which take us beyond connectivity to the value to individuals and the community of access to information and information literacy skills.

In the first half of 2000 the Association will host a national forum to bring together library and allied organisations to consider priorities for the sector in research, national statistical collection and profiling, and mechanisms for responding to key policy issues.

I would like to thank all those members who have contributed so much to the work of the Association this year through participation in divisional activities and other committees. General councillors and the Executive have worked constructively throughout to make significant and at times difficult decisions.

Congratulations to Alan Bundy our incoming vice-president, president-elect, Imogen Garner our new chair of the Board of Education and Ross Todd deputy chair. Our staff has provided great support. Craig Anderson has led the way and coaxed us all through the renewal process. ■

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“Go on, ask me anything!”

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