

Another year draws to a close...



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Our historians, public intellectuals and 'elite' will provide interesting analysis and commentary over the next few years on the good, the bad and the ugly we take with us into the new century...

It is hard to believe we are already closing on the first year of the new century. Our historians, public intellectuals and 'elite' (so-called by some and often with what can only be interpreted as a derogatory slant) will provide interesting analysis and commentary over the next few years on the good, the bad and the ugly we take with us as a nation into the new century. It seems to be a time when juxtaposition of dissimilar or opposite concepts, a classification technique familiar to our sector, prevails. The dominance of international circumstances raises questions about whether influential national governments will move away from small to big government. At a time when our own government is redefining our physical borders it is promoting the opening up of our trade and markets to international access and competition. The information rich/information poor divide continues; we are encouraged to think globally and act locally. With the phenomenal growth in global communications and trade comes a desire for local defence against cultural imperialism to ensure cultural expression, heritage and economic prosperity are retained.

The new year period brings with it for most a time for reflection on the past and promises for the future. The future for our sector is bright. On a professional level I find it very stimulating to be a member of the most exciting and dynamic information profession in the world. The Association is at the leading edge of management of a professional association. We have the opportunity and ability to acknowledge the wider environment, to continuously think through our role in that wider environment, to be financially viable, and to nurture a culture of growing and adapting. We need to be opportunists to secure ongoing success. Our Board of Directors has the courage and the commitment to be seeking opportunities and be focussed on the future, while reflecting on what has brought us so far. This has resulted in a number of significant developments throughout the year.

The establishment of the new group structure in the middle of the year provided members with the opportunity to create networks of shared interest. Seventy-two groups have been set up and are offering valuable activities and services, within operational frameworks that range from electronic to the previous formal structure of monthly committee meetings. We are now working with the groups on budgets, criteria for funding, and levels of support and assistance. This new structure has also aided communication, financial management, and delighted our auditors. A further benefit of the new structure is its flexibility to accommodate changing needs across the sector and it will be interesting to see how that is reflected in the coverage of groups the Association has at the end of next year.

To complement the self-selecting groups the Board has instituted policy advisory and reference groups with specific terms of reference. All are to

be reviewed at least every two years, as is our representation on other committees/bodies, to ensure that our current and potential needs are being met. In addition the Board has established specific purpose sector-wide consultative groups for many of the key initiatives underway and these are limited to the life of the project or consultation purpose.

One such group is the project working group led by past president Mairéad Browne for library and information services education for the knowledge age (LISEKA). This is an opportunity for our sector to reposition itself in the information world. How many professions have such an opportunity in what has been for us a comparatively short history? The goal of the project is to achieve 'an agreed national framework and approach to provision of effective career-long education and professional development opportunities for information workers'. It may involve some courageous decisions and rethinking of traditional approaches and practices. It will require some shifts in thinking within the Association and across the sector. A very informative 'ideas forum' was held in November with wide representation from within the sector and the working group will now work with those ideas and push the consultation wider to beyond the sector. My work across other associations and organisations has shown me that the view from outside our sector looking in is much more optimistic than the introspective view often expressed in our literature. The progress report on the ideas forum will be presented to the December Board meeting and National Policy Congress meetings and published in the next issue of *inCite*.

A further development is looking at how we can better use information technologies to communicate and deliver services. Initial work is being done by Dr Patricia Gillard of User Insite on how members engage with each other, with staff, and with the services offered or possible new services. This work is a start, not an end in itself. It will inform how we do things in the future, including new services and IT capabilities, and there should be some significant changes during next year.

Importantly in looking to the future we need to understand the nature and role of associations. Many members join associations for different reasons from twenty years ago and a non-joining of organisations attitude is predominant across our society. This challenges ALIA to think through just what it seeks to represent and how it may do this.

Thank you all for your continuing support for the Association throughout the year. Thank you to all our volunteers who keep the groups, conferences and other activities happening. Thank you to national office staff all of who have a genuine commitment to a great future for the Association. And my final thanks to our President Alan Bundy, our past president Mairéad Browne and all our directors this year for their courage and vision. May

you all enjoy the festive season and I look forward to seeing you next year.

Did you know...

Personal members account for 63.5 per cent of ALIA membership income, broken down as Associates 49.65 per cent and other members, library technicians and affiliates 13.75 per cent. Institutional members account for 34.66 per cent of ALIA income.

ALIA copyright advisory service answered 49 individual copyright queries in the quarter ending 30 September. Most of the questions dealt with website copyright problems and services to library and information centre users.

Craig Grimison, chair of the intellectual property and copyright advisory group, is chairing a workshop of CAL and ALIA representatives on copyright issues in corporate libraries. The workshop is in Sydney on 14 December and is not open to the public. Any ALIA member wishing to feed in relevant issues relevant to corporate libraries and copyright should e-mail michelle.baird@alia.org.au

Our industrial relations and employment service has received a noticeable increase in requests from employers, often from small organisations unfamiliar with library work, sometimes employing a librarian for the first time. These organisations are not always ALIA members but we

obviously have a vested interest in ensuring that they are providing appropriate employment conditions to potential or actual employees who often are members. In a number of cases we have been able to encourage employers to establish a continuing relationship with national office when establishing and maintaining employment contracts.

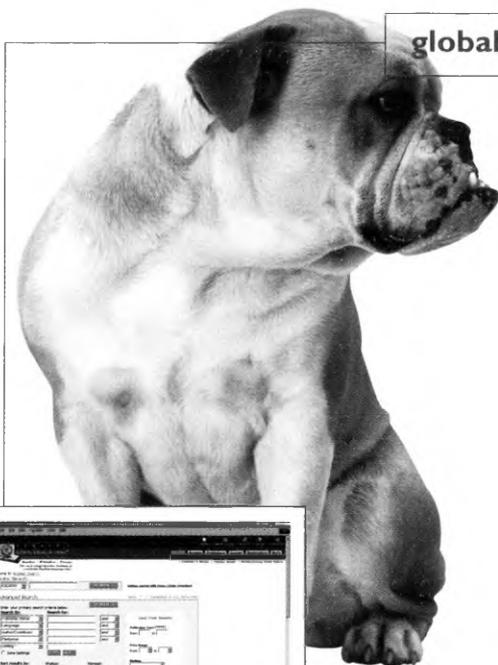
On the employee side, too many members are having difficulty accessing benefits to which they are entitled, especially in smaller corporate libraries and in employment through labour hire companies. This involves both inadequate wage rates and initial refusal to provide proper entitlements to departing employees. Recently, national office has intervened in a number of such situations, almost always with success. Considerable sums can be involved: for example, when recently a private sector employer ultimately accepted ALIA's representations for revised calculation of redundancy benefits for a member, to give proper effect to legislative provisions, the amount consequentially received by the member was more than \$11 000. The typical member response [copied below] is hardly surprising!

Phil: Thank you very much for your letter to my former employer. They have now paid me my correct termination entitlements, thanks to your intervention. Kind regards and much gratitude, Ann.

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