

## Making the difference

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As I write this column, regional and other groups, ALIA National Office and the Board of Directors are all in the process of preparing for the National Policy Congress (NPC) to be held in Canberra at the beginning of November. This is the third time that a National Policy Congress has met and it is yet another outcome of the renewal process that has led to the development of more than sixty self-nominating groups. At past NPCs, representatives of the groups have met to discuss achievements and challenges and explore possible resolutions to the issues that have been facing ALIA and its members. This third NPC has a slightly different shape. While a smaller number of people will be present at the NPC than in the past, the meetings of the regional groups ensure that as many members as possible have an opportunity to contribute to the NPC agenda and to ALIA's directions over the next few years. The agenda for these meetings mirrors that of the NPC with the major topic for consideration being ALIA's planning for 2003 and 2004. With the title of *ALIA: Making the difference*, the draft plans will be considered in the context of the broader social, cultural, technological and economic issues that were identified and discussed at ALIA2002, the biennial conference held in Sydney in May. The NPC promises to be an exciting and stimulating working meeting and I am looking forward to engaging in the conversations that are an essential part of the processes and activities of an Association committed to the development of the highest quality library and information services.

The high regard in which Australian library and information services and ALIA are held by people in other parts of the world was one of the lasting impressions that I took away from the IFLA conference in Glasgow. Now that the structure of a renewed ALIA is in place and we can turn our attention to the programs that will make a difference to our personal and institutional members I took the decision that it is timely for ALIA to engage with the international community and so, with the executive director, I represented the Association at IFLA. It was a privilege to be at a Council Meeting at which Alex Byrne, a Fellow of our Association and chair of IFLA's FAIFE Committee, presented the Glasgow Declaration. There were many highlights of IFLA: a thought provoking address by Professor Martin Nakata from the University of South Australia on indigenous knowledge;

a discussion of 'library spaces' in the year 2040; conversations about the challenges facing libraries and information services and associations in other countries; discussions about the ways that young library and information professionals are exerting influence and invigorating their associations, not only in Australia but also in Africa; a brainstorming session held by the president-elect, Kay Raseroka on IFLA's directions during her term of office; receptions held in the recently expanded and renovated National Museum of Scotland in Edinburgh and in the new Science Centre in Glasgow; a concourse of mobile libraries; a gathering of about thirty ALIA members and colleagues, some of whom are currently practising in England, France, Scotland and Iceland; a trade exhibition of international scope; and a workshop on education and training where I was invited to respond to the quality program in universities and LIS programs in the United Kingdom from an Australian perspective.

Closer to home, the value of library and information services has also been featured in a debate in the House of Representatives of the Commonwealth Parliament. In Private Members Business, Mark Latham, the member for Werriwa, linked the themes of lifelong learning and libraries in supporting the role of public libraries in their communities, seeking Federal responsibility for assisting the development of the public library network and affordability of the Kinetic database for public libraries. Other speakers from the electorates of Sturt, Franklin and Paterson supported the key role of libraries. They reminded the House that the internet is not a surrogate for libraries and asserted the role of libraries in not only providing information but also contributing to the development of the imagination. They pointed to the responsiveness of libraries to changing community needs and provided many examples, naming both libraries and librarians.

Clearly we have library and information services that are exemplars of their kind. But the provision of services is patchy across the country and across the sectors of library and information services. The planning process that is the focus of the National Policy Congress gives us the chance to address both the sustainability of excellent services and the uneven quality of service provision and to develop strategies appropriate for the Association to follow in collaboration with its partners. ■