

Hard slog wins best-ever wage decision

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In a March 1998 Workwatch [http://www.alia.org.au/incite/1998/03/workwatch.html] I told members the NSW State Government had set up a Pay

Equity Taskforce. I said that ALIA had been taking a keen interest, and in the later decision to conduct a formal Pay Equity Inquiry. I informed members that I had contacted the Taskforce to argue for inclusion of librarians as their professional focus group for pay equity analysis and policy development. And that later I had accepted an invitation from the Director for Equal Opportunity in Public Employment [ODEOPE] to assist with development of the Crown case to be put to the Inquiry on behalf of librarians. I advised that ALIA believed this was a rare opportunity for the worth of librarians' work to be properly recognised, with real potential for the redressing of long-standing inequities.

With the release of its landmark decision in the first pay equity test case for librarians and library technicians, a Full Bench of the New South Wales Industrial Relations Commission [NSWIRC] has now handsomely vindicated that view. The new award won by the Public Service Association [PSA] is a triumph for library workers in NSW and a beacon for their colleagues across Australia.

When columnist Pádraic P McGuinness launched a *Sydney Morning Herald* dia-

tribe against the decision, discerning librarians suspected they must have achieved something really significant. When *The Australian* followed with a carping editorial, they knew it. Knee-jerk, negative reaction often accompanies disturbance of the status quo and this decision has been a prime example. The Full Bench ruled that librarians and library technicians employed by the NSW Government have been seriously undervalued and underpaid. To remedy that inequity they have awarded perhaps the most generous pay increases ever won by library workers in Australia [see panel]. Moreover, the professional status of librarians has been formally endorsed, with ALIA's qualification standards adopted as the yardstick.

It is vital to recognise that the decision is not just a statement about historic gender-based discrimination. It is certainly that in part. But the size of wage increases indicates the Full Bench has gone much further. The NSWIRC has awarded increases of this magnitude because librarians and technicians have also experienced major increases in work value during the past decade. This was not reflected in their salary levels. In other words, the decision is *both* a pay equity and a work value judgement. It potentially affects all ALIA members, though of course only those in NSW state government employment benefit directly.

A number of other discrete categories can be identified. First are those who have formal, common-law connection to public sector rates in NSW through established benchmarking. Many of them are subject to employment contracts drawn up after employer consultation with ALIA. Most are in the community non-award sector or in private industry. These members are entitled to expect more or less automatic flow-on of the new rates in accordance with their established contracts. Second are members employed in NSW but in other sectors, such as local government, hospitals and higher education. These people are covered by different awards. Their unions will need to study the findings of the full bench and develop their own claims, using the work value findings as their major basis. I shall be liaising with those unions shortly. Members should do the same. Thirdly, members in other states can benefit from the decision if unions take up the issues behind the NSW result. The Queensland and Tasmanian governments have already decided to amend their wage fixing principles. They will provide for pay equity claims under new equal remunera-

Panel: Current and new salary structures

| Current grade | Salary | New grade | New salary |
|---------------|--------|-----------|------------|
|---------------|--------|-----------|------------|

Librarians

| | | | |
|---------------------|--------|--------------|--------|
| Base Grade Year 1 | 34 752 | Grade 1 Yr 1 | 36 259 |
| Year 2 | 36 259 | Grade 1 Yr 2 | 38 365 |
| Year 3 | 37 980 | Grade 1 Yr 3 | 40 536 |
| Year 4 | 39 788 | Grade 1 Yr 4 | 43 062 |
| Year 5 | 41 757 | Grade 1 Yr 5 | 45 223 |
| Year 6 | 43 936 | Grade 1 Yr 6 | 47 373 |
| Year 7 | 45 667 | Grade 2 Yr 1 | 49 630 |
| | | Grade 2 Yr 2 | 51 294 |
| | | Grade 2 Yr 3 | 53 842 |
| | | Grade 2 Yr 4 | 56 006 |
| Senior Grade 1 Yr 1 | 47 000 | Grade 3 Yr 1 | 58 951 |
| Grade 1 Yr 2 | 48 376 | Grade 3 Yr 2 | 60 771 |
| Grade 2 Yr 1 | 50 294 | Grade 3 Yr 2 | 60 771 |
| Grade 2 Yr 2 | 51 794 | Grade 3 Yr 3 | 63 158 |
| Grade 2 Yr 3 | 53 842 | Grade 3 Yr 4 | 65 681 |
| Divisional | | | |
| Grade 1 Yr 1 | 58 339 | Grade 4 Yr 1 | 67 647 |
| Grade 1 Yr 2 | 60 193 | Grade 4 Yr 2 | 69 638 |
| Grade 1 Yr 3 | 62 581 | Grade 4 Yr 3 | 71 694 |
| Grade 2 Yr 1 | 64 379 | Grade 5 Yr 1 | 76 016 |
| Grade 2 Yr 2 | 66 990 | Grade 5 Yr 2 | 78 563 |
| Grade 2 Yr 3 | 69 638 | Grade 5 Yr 3 | 81 089 |
| Associate | 75 377 | Grade 5 Yr 4 | 83 840 |

Technicians

Assistant Library Technician Grade 1 (library assistant)

| | | | |
|--------------|--------|--------|--------|
| Under 17 yrs | 14 741 | Year 1 | 28 360 |
| 17 yrs | 17 557 | Year 1 | 28 360 |
| 18 yrs | 19 924 | Year 1 | 28 360 |
| 19 yrs | 23 997 | Year 1 | 28 360 |
| 20 yrs | 25 381 | Year 1 | 28 360 |
| Year 1 | 27 877 | Year 1 | 28 360 |
| Year 2 | 28 629 | Year 2 | 30 096 |
| Year 3 | 29 851 | Year 3 | 31 983 |
| Year 4 | 30 842 | Year 3 | 31 983 |

Assistant Library Technician Grade 2 (unqualified)

| | | | |
|------|--------|--------|--------|
| Yr 1 | 31 676 | Year 4 | 35 026 |
| Yr 2 | 32 809 | Year 4 | 35 026 |
| Yr 3 | 33 737 | Year 4 | 35 026 |
| Yr 4 | 34 752 | Year 4 | 35 026 |

Assistant Library Technician Grade 2 (qualified)

| | | | |
|------|--------|--------|--------|
| Yr 1 | 31 676 | Year 4 | 35 026 |
| Yr 2 | 32 809 | Year 5 | 35 982 |
| Yr 3 | 33 737 | Year 5 | 35 982 |
| Yr 4 | 34 752 | Year 5 | 35 982 |

Library Technician

| | | | |
|------|--------|--------------|--------|
| Yr 1 | 35 635 | Grade 1 Yr 1 | 36 945 |
| Yr 2 | 36 641 | Grade 1 Yr 2 | 38 365 |
| Yr 3 | 37 325 | Grade 1 Yr 3 | 40 536 |
| Yr 4 | 38 694 | Grade 1 Yr 4 | 43 062 |

Senior Library Technician

| | | | |
|------|--------|--------------|--------|
| Yr 1 | 39 417 | Grade 2 Yr 1 | 47 850 |
| Yr 2 | 40 536 | Grade 2 Yr 2 | 49 360 |
| Yr 3 | 41 338 | Grade 2 Yr 3 | 51 294 |
| Yr 4 | 42 646 | Grade 2 Yr 4 | 53 842 |

tion principles based on those in NSW. In these states it may be necessary to include analysis of the extent to which librarians are unreasonably grouped at lower levels on single-stream classification structures covering different occupational groups. Few members in those states are covered by librarian specific awards. This contrasts with the long-standing librarians' award that was the basis for the new decision covering their NSW counterparts. In the remaining states — and federally — things will be more difficult, but strong work value arguments can still be developed. We will be contacting interstate unions to inquire about their intentions. Members should do likewise. The remaining group is that made up of private sector members in all states who work entirely award-free. There are no direct links — formal or de-facto — with the NSW case. For these people, the argument for adjustment needs to centre around the findings on work value. Specifically, it is obvious that much of the major increase in work value that the NSWIRC identified for the group under review must logically have also been experienced by private sector librarians. To

assist in putting that view effectively, I intend to draft a submission to employers of non-award members seeking review of their current salary arrangements.

It can be seen that much work remains to be done if the benefits of this most encouraging decision are to be gained by other ALIA members. Progress toward that outcome will not be easy but we will be pursuing it vigorously.

Finally, it needs to be acknowledged that many people contributed to the result achieved in NSW. Organisations — such as the PSA, ODEOPE and ALIA — and their paid staff made valuable contributions. Most important, however, was a small, dedicated group of library workers — led by the indefatigable Kate Burnham — who gave their own unpaid time for more than five years. They put in the hard yards of gathering, collating and presenting compelling evidence that neither the Pay Equity Inquiry nor the Full Bench could ignore. The victory is primarily theirs. But there is a message for all members: it is simply that things happen when you take it upon yourselves to make them happen. ■

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