

The death of the book?

Outcomes of the National Scholarly Communication Forum seminar, held at the National Maritime Museum, March 2003

More than one hundred of Australia's leading humanities academics, scholarly publishers, librarians and booksellers met at the National Maritime Museum in March to debate whether there is a crisis in academic publishing, particularly in Australia.

In the end, the general conclusion was that the book is not dead, although it may well be dormant in terms of global distribution of Australian content. The book will rise again through the increasingly electronic creation of knowledge and will be produced, accessed and distributed in new ways that require synergies between authors, publishers, librarians and printers.

New alliances need to be forged in the digital environment to ensure the effective distribution and branding of Australian research in a publishing arena that is increasingly dominated by multinational commercial publishers.

Issues such as copyright, quality assurance, digital rights, and scholarly advocacy will all need to be addressed to ensure the effectiveness of Australia's 'long distance thinkers' who contribute valuable insights to the frameworks of a just and reasoning Australian society.

The conference, which brought together key players in the scholarly publishing chain from creator to consumer,

revealed the need for collaborative actions to overcome significant problems in Australia's knowledge distribution in the humanities and social sciences.

Specific outcomes from the conference for discussion are as follows:

- The National Scholarly Communication Forum (NSCF) will provide leadership and intensify its role as an ongoing forum between scholars, librarians, publishers and booksellers to promote Australian knowledge creation and dissemination.
- It is clear that many of the global issues in relation to the electronic dissemination of knowledge which would benefit Australian research are unfamiliar to many Australian academics. A co-ordinated campaign of scholarly advocacy is recommended to inform appropriate bodies.
- The current method of quantitative assessment of Australian publications for funding purposes by DEST is having profound effects on scholarly research publication and habits. The publication indicators are impacting on research dissemination in an unintended way. The NSCF calls for a major reassessment of the DEST indicators for funding of research and research training, particularly in the areas of quality assessment and Aus-

tralian research output viewed through international citation indices.

- The NSCF supports the early adoption of the DEST Systemic Infrastructure Framework for the development of university E-Print/E-Press and Digital Thesis developments.
- Research and scoping studies need to be undertaken into research grant outcomes and their dissemination.
- Technology transfer initiatives need to be explored with industry partners to ensure efficiencies in the context of new E-Press developments. The Enhanced Printing Industry Competitiveness Scheme (EPICS) has highlighted that there is a need to integrate content development, content management and content distribution strategies. Digital access to monographic material in the humanities, utilising new technologies and opportunities needs to be explored.
- Analysis needs to be undertaken to establish the real nature of publishing opportunities for early career researchers, particularly in the humanities and social sciences for disseminating research output.
- In the context of new opportunities likely to be available in upgrades of Australian grid computing and network capacity, both in textual and non-textual environments, liaison should be developed to promote E-humanities opportunities for Australian researchers in the humanities.
- Industry and national collaborative infrastructure talks. Possible conference with the National Library of Australia (NLA), Learned Academies, CAL, and other interested bodies, such as EPICS Networks, on relevant infrastructure for humanities, social sciences and Asian studies in terms of resource discovery and industry standards for knowledge creation and distribution. Opportunities for linkage projects through ARC need to be investigated.

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At the NSCF meeting at Sydney University on 28 May it was determined that the next round table should take place in late October. It is provisionally entitled 'Strictly broadband'.

Professor Malcolm Gillies,
deputy vice-chancellor (Education)

Making law more accessible

Australia's laws and regulations will become more accessible and consumer-friendly under legislation introduced into the Federal Parliament. The *Legislative Instruments Bill* reflects the Government's commitment to establishing a comprehensive regime for the consistent management of, and public access to, Commonwealth legislative instruments. Legislative instruments are written instruments that are made in the exercise of power delegated by the Parliament. Examples include regulations, ordinances, determinations or other written instruments that determine the law.

The centrepiece of the Bill is an electronic Federal Register of Legislative Instruments so individuals and businesses can find all the information they need in terms of legal requirements in one place [<http://frli.law.gov.au/>].

The register will be accessible via the internet and anyone will be able to quickly and easily search for Commonwealth legislative instruments. It will also include up-to-date compilations, showing the text of legislative instruments as currently in force following amendments.

In addition, the Bill promotes high standards of drafting and encourages consultation before making a legislative instrument, particularly if the instrument will have an effect on business or restrict competition.

In order to reflect the important role Parliament has in scrutinising instruments, the Bill provides that instruments will need to be tabled before Parliament and the vast majority will be subject to Parliamentary scrutiny.

The Bill also provides that legislative instruments will sunset after ten years, ensuring that instruments will be regularly reviewed and updated and will only remain operative if they continue to be relevant.