

# How can you help?



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The Australian Government's Cultural Heritage Reference Group for Iraq has recently released the final report of its advice to the Minister for the Environment and Heritage. The report has been discussed with reciprocal government representatives in the United States of America and Britain and perceived by them as a model for the process to be undertaken and includes short- and long-term recommendations.

The report includes a number of recommendations where support could come from the Australian library and information sector: support the Iraq museums and libraries with the development of databases where possible; support cultural exchange between Australian and Iraqi cultural heritage professionals; seek support from libraries, archives and cultural institutions for co-ordinating the restocking of libraries, particularly university libraries in Iraq; consideration of provision of short-term infrastructure such as storage.

A number of concerned members have contacted me about the situation in Iraq and what can be done to assist. So that ALIA can more-actively work with the government I am seeking to draw together a register of those who have specific expertise and/or time to work on recovery and restoration initiatives. Please contact me if you have expertise to offer in Iraq/Middle East subject specialisation, conservation, disaster recovery, training, database development, cataloguing or any other area you consider would be of value. I can also provide you with a copy of the report.

I was privileged at IFLA Berlin 2003 to attend the session by Jean-Marie Arnoult, Inspecteur général des bibliothèques, Paris, France. The full conference paper is available at <http://www.ifla.org/IV/ifla69/papers/180e-Arnoult.pdf>.

Mr Arnoult visited Iraq from 28 June to 6 July as a member of the second UNESCO mission. It also included four archaeologists and an architect. It had been planned that the mission split in two but for security reasons it had to stay together thereby reducing the ability to visit libraries outside the main areas of Baghdad, Mosul, and Basra.

The library collections appear to have fared better than implied in media reports. Many national archives were destroyed, except for some historical records that were removed to a mosque with much of the library collection. It was not clear why the archives were purposefully destroyed as they were not political archives.

Mr Arnoult believes that efforts at recovery and restoration will be hindered by the lack of cataloguing records and trained or qualified staff. Staff is currently being paid but not coming to work, given the unstable situation. When they do return to work they will require considerable training, as little has been added to the collections since the embargoes were put in place. Staffing in libraries was comprised predominantly of administrators and attendants.

He recommends four orientations to UNESCO and has a pre-requisite that the remaining collections be secured, for example an estimated thirty per cent of the National Library collection was lost and the rest is housed in seven different locations.

- *Reconstruction of libraries and building of other libraries.* The Coalition is looking to find vacant buildings to re-locate libraries that have been destroyed beyond repair. He doesn't agree with this, for the National Library in particular, as libraries are not an administrative service to relocate easily. He pushes for current buildings to be restored and states that this is an issue of will rather than money as there is plenty of money. For example, the Coalition has completely restored the Mosul Public Library (which was weakened by bombing) with equipment from Turkey. Firefighters brought in with the Coalition troops identified the same method in Baghdad and Basra, for fire destruction and looting raising speculation that much of it was pre-meditated.

- *Restore and build collections.* With no money in the last ten years due to the embargoes, what remains of the collections is very out-of-date, even in university libraries. UNESCO will need to work with countries that have a history with Iraq, such as Britain and France, to reproduce and replace the collection. The most important collection of manuscripts is safe, but like other collections, will need to be catalogued and conserved.

On hearing the presentation, the national librarian of Egypt expressed his shock that such a situation should have developed. He offered immediate assistance to university libraries for the September start of the academic year, since texts in Egypt would be most suitable as they are in Arabic and of a similar curriculum. The point was also made that prior to the embargoes, university and library education in Iraq was reputedly the best in the Arab world.

A caution was also given to take care with commercial initiatives seeking to rush in to install computer systems in libraries without thought to training and specific needs.

- *Requalification and training of workers.* Formerly directors were generally political appointments. There were few staff at middle levels because there were no ac-

## Feedback to your Board of Directors

Do you have an idea, compliment or concern about your Association? Contact any director below on personal issues and ideas will be reviewed at each meeting of the Board.

E-mail to [feedback@alia.org.au](mailto:feedback@alia.org.au) will be automatically forwarded to all Board members.

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quisitions over the last ten years. The majority of other staff was untrained assistants or attendants. The aim will be to have training and exchange of personnel with other professionals in participating countries.

- **Administration and legislation.** There is no administration in Iraq at present and is it very important to set up an administrative structure that includes libraries. However it is going to be very difficult to achieve this and to develop systems such as legal deposit.

Mr Arnoult noted that archaeology and antiquities are the priority for Iraqi authorities, and the library sector will need to keep pushing for inclusion

in the re-established administrative structure. He is of the view that, as for antiquities, collectors placed 'orders' for particular valuable texts. A delegate from Lebanon advised that many of the valuable holdings that disappeared in the devastation of the national library in the 1970s have yet to be retrieved, though the whereabouts of some are known. <http://www.ifla.org/VI/4/admin/icbs-iraq.htm> provides further information on the libraries and archives in Iraq.

The Australian Government is the only member of the Coalition to be a signatory to the Hague Convention for the Protection of Cultural Property in the Event of Armed Conflict. ■

## Aurora Leadership Institute 2004 ▲ AURORA FOUNDATION

Applications are now open for the seventh Aurora Leadership Institute to be held at Thredbo Alpine Village from 8–13 February 2004. Full details of application requirements and procedures may be found on the Aurora website. Once again, John Shannon and Becky Schreiber will lead the Institute.

Intending applicants are advised that the process of selection is quite competitive, and that the information sources listed on the website — including the May 2003 issue of the *Australian Library Journal* — should be consulted prior to submission. Successful applicants will be notified during October 2003. Professional involvement with ALIA is an advantage.

Further details are available from the website: <http://alia.org.au/aurora/> and from Ian McCallum, Aurora Foundation secretary, phone 02 6257 9177.

## ALIAVic: who? what? why?

### Who?

ALIAVic is pleased to announce the formation of a new committee.

### What?

ALIAVic is your local group for all Victorian members of ALIA.

### Why?

ALIAVic exists to facilitate communication and networking between Victorian library and information professionals. Regular meetings are held with speakers from a wide variety of workplaces. ALIAVic will avoid duplicating the efforts of other groups. Indeed, it will encourage the work of individual groups and only focus on the broader professional and intra-professional issues.

Details of ALIAVic can be found at: <http://alia.org.au/members-only/groups/aliavic/>.

ALIAVic also has an e-mail discussion list (aliaVIC) for the distribution of Victorian library and ALIA news to ALIA members and to promote communication and discussion amongst members. The e-list is used to advertise section and group activities. For details about joining this e-list go to: <http://lists.alia.org.au/mailman/listinfo/aliaVIC/>. Enter your e-

mail address and a password. You will be sent an e-mail asking you to confirm your subscription — just follow the instructions and you will be communicating with the rest of the group in no time at all.

### Your committee

**Convenor:** Margaret Smith, State Library of Victoria, [msmith@slv.vic.gov.au](mailto:msmith@slv.vic.gov.au);

**Secretary/treasurer:** Ian McGregor, Yarra Plenty Regional Library, [imcgreg@yprl.vic.gov.au](mailto:imcgreg@yprl.vic.gov.au).

**Committee members:** Jill Baker, [baker@acer.edu.au](mailto:baker@acer.edu.au); Tania Barry, [ktb@netspace.net.au](mailto:ktb@netspace.net.au); Jenelle Cleary, [jenelle.cleary@parliament.vic.gov.au](mailto:jenelle.cleary@parliament.vic.gov.au); Wendy Costigan, [wcostigan@yprl.vic.gov.au](mailto:wcostigan@yprl.vic.gov.au); Jennifer Goh, [jennifer.goh@dpi.vic.gov.au](mailto:jennifer.goh@dpi.vic.gov.au); Kerrie Kelly, [kkelly@slv.vic.gov.au](mailto:kkelly@slv.vic.gov.au); Moyra McAllister, [moyra.mcallister@bdw.com](mailto:moyra.mcallister@bdw.com); Alison O'Connor, [alison.o'connor@bdw.com](mailto:alison.o'connor@bdw.com); Margaret Roberts, [mroberts@brightongrammar.vic.edu.au](mailto:mroberts@brightongrammar.vic.edu.au); Trevor Wakely, [t.wakely@bom.gov.au](mailto:t.wakely@bom.gov.au); Cheryl Walker, [walkcm@mornpen.vic.gov.au](mailto:walkcm@mornpen.vic.gov.au).

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