

LIW Forum

On Monday 24 May, the Association hosted a Library and Information Week Forum picking up on the LIW theme and aiming to develop a collaborative framework to advance electronic networking initiatives and ideas for sharing resources, improving efficiencies, increasing access to public information and enhancing services provided by the library and information sector.

Invited participants included twenty-two representatives from the library and information services sector, Federal government, Telstra, local government, and community networking research.

The Forum focused on the Senate Inquiry into Libraries in the Online Environment report recommendation 7:

- a. the Australian government negotiate with telecommunications carriers to establish an 'e-rate' or discount rate for broadband access to public libraries and that, if negotiations are not successful, consider imposing a requirement on carriers under the Universal Service Obligation arrangement; and
- b. further funds be allocated under an expanded National Broadband Strategy for expanding broadband access in libraries;

and related recommendations on digitisation, community networks and access to electronic information.

The Forum brought together key players to discuss these recommendations in the context of current models, government programs, initiatives, and priorities within the sector, and to agree on actions to progress shared priorities and goals for the sector. The Association proposed that the Forum be the precursor of a national symposium in 2005 to further advance collaboration in E-community linked networking, broadband access and public access to electronic resources and services through libraries.

The Senate report is available at http://www.aph.gov.au/Senate/committee/ecita_ctte/online_libraries/report/index.htm.

ALIA's response to the recommendations signed off by the Board of

Directors on 13 November 2003 is at <http://alia.org.au/advocacy/inquiries/roloe.report.recommendations.html>.

The Forum is the first stage of a commitment made by the Directors at that time to promote opportunities for discussion of the report and discussed by president Chris Mackenzie at the Peak Bodies Forum on 17 November last year.

A report on the Forum will be published in the next issue of *inCite*.

Filtering still not the answer

In the late 1990s the Association put a lot of effort into lobbying against the federal government's policy direction that the use of filtering technologies to block access to what it deemed to be illegal or offensive internet content be incorporated into the *Broadcasting Services Act*. ALIA argued that filtering technology was not the answer as it resulted in the blocking of information that was not illegal or offensive. A combination of education on using the internet and teaching information literacy skills was a more positive approach. Education won out, but a two-year review of the Online Content Co-regulatory Scheme Amendments was included in the legislation. NetAlert, one of our partners for LIW was set up as the community education body.

That review is now concluded and the Minister Daryl Williams released the report in May. http://www.dcita.gov.au/Article/0,,0_1-2_1-3_163-4_111736,00.html.

In our submission [<http://alia.org.au/advocacy/submissions/schedule.5.review.html>] the Association again argued that the practices adopted by its members in providing public access to the internet are responsible, educative and informative and offer users the opportunity to fulfil their information needs without restriction of access. We supported this with the results of our survey [<http://alia.org.au/advocacy/internet.access/>] and concluded that the government's aim under Schedule 5 of the *Broadcasting Services Act 1992* to restrict access to internet content that is likely to offend reasonable adults and protect children from internet content that is unsuitable for them can be met without restricting individual users' rights

of access to information.

Among the review findings:

- There is clear support for community education as a key element of the Scheme.
- NetAlert could develop greater links with local councils, libraries, state and territory education departments, academic institutions and other Commonwealth portfolios in developing its community education programs.
- NetAlert should further extend its community education activities to the 'offline' environment, including libraries and schools.
- Filtering technologies have not developed to the point where they can feasibly filter R-rated content hosted overseas that is not subject to a restricted access system. Though URL or IP addressed-based filtering does appear technically feasible at the ISP or server level mandating this would involve high implementation costs and practical difficulties and so the costs of a mandated requirement to filter do not appear justified. Further investigation is needed on this as part of a review of industry codes, developments in filtering technologies should continue to be monitored, and research into filters and associated technologies be regularly undertaken by NetAlert and the ABA.
- During the two years under review the number of ISPs has decreased from 718 to 563 and there has been a consumer shift towards very large ISPs.

The Department of Communications, Information Technology and the Arts is now undertaking a further review of the regulation of content delivered to convergent mobile communications devices; and the Minister has directed the Australian Communications Authority (ACA) to regulate to restrict access by children to adult content delivered over mobile phones on the new premium rate 19x range and on proprietary networks operated by carriers. These adult services will only be provided on specific numbers determined by the ACA. ■