

The National Licensing Proposal: an interview with Jan Fullerton



Jan Fullerton

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The National Licensing Proposal aims to make full-text *electronic resources easily accessible to Australians through their local libraries*. In this interview with ALIA member Kate Davis, Jan Fullerton, director-general of the National Library of Australia, shares the vision.

What is the National Licensing Proposal?

The National Licensing Proposal is an exciting initiative that aims to enable Australian libraries to provide easy access to relevant full-text electronic resources through affordable subscriptions.

How did it come about?

For some years, individual Australian libraries and various library consortia have subscribed to a variety of e-resources. There remain, however, some Australians who do not have access to reliable and authoritative online information simply because the library with which they are affiliated does not subscribe to such resources.

This issue was highlighted by the Parliament of Australia's Senate Inquiry into the Role of Libraries in the Online Environment. A recommendation of this report was that there should be national access to selected full-text e-resources; however government funding was not made available.

The National Library of Australia convened a national licensing forum in December 2004 to discuss the possibilities of the Australian library sector finding a self-funded solution to the problem. There was strong support from the attending sector representatives and a second forum followed in 2005, which resulted in the formation of the National Licensing Proposal Reference Group which includes representatives from the key sectors of the Australian library community – public, state, government, school, university, TAFE and special libraries.

Who's running the initiative?

The Australian library sector drives the National Licensing Proposal and Julie Rae has chaired the Reference Group since October 2005, with secretariat support from within the National Library. Members of the Reference Group have extensive experience in licence negotiation and considerable technical expertise.

I am personally committed to the success of the National Licensing Proposal and it has been encouraging to see the progress that the Reference Group has made.

What benefit will the National Licensing Proposal have for libraries?

By collectively negotiating and purchasing widely sought e-resources, our bargaining power is also strengthened. Commonly agreed licence terms and conditions will save considerable time in vendor liaison and result in more affordable services.

I anticipate that the success of the National Licensing Proposal will by no means undermine other library consortia, rather it will free them up to pursue specialist resources.

Speaking of users, how will the National Licensing Proposal benefit information seekers?

Librarians know well that the answers to questions lie beyond Internet search engines like Google and we need to empower information seekers to confidently use the subscription resources at their disposal via their library – whether or not they realise it.

Australians, regardless of their location, could have easy access to quality full-text e-resources. With linkages from within catalogue records in Libraries Australia (which is itself harvested by Google), membership of a library and Internet access may be all that is required from the user's perspective.

So, what's the next step?

The 3rd National Licensing Forum will be hosted at the National Library on 3 July 2006. The agenda for this meeting includes the work of the National Licensing Proposal Reference Group to date, including a governance model and pricing framework. I anticipate the Forum will also seek agreement on the distribution of costs and the process of selecting e-resources in the priority areas of 'General Reference' and 'News & Current Affairs', as identified by the December 2005 survey of Australian library interests.

Planning is well underway to test the market through a Request for Proposal (RFP) and vendors have been invited to attend a briefing session on 3 July.

How can the Australian library community remain informed of developments?

I encourage libraries to visit <http://www.nla.gov.au/nlp/> and subscribe to the NLP-L discussion list. Regular postings to the list and website keep interested persons up-to-date with the progress of the National Licensing Proposal. ■

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