



**Derek Whitehead**  
ALIA President

## Feedback to your Board of Directors

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## The best conference ever

'The best games ever' has become a bit of a cliché since the Sydney Olympic Games, but *dreaming08*, ALIA's Biennial Conference held in Alice Springs on 2-5 September, has a claim to be the best conference ever. The conference had a dedicated organising committee, a distinctive program, a unique and friendly ambience, a good focus on our profession and our Association, a great trade exhibition, and a location which was absolutely new and totally different for most of those attending. No wonder almost 600 people turned up.

In fact, ALIA has held a few recent conferences in regional locations – Albury-Wodonga, Gold Coast and Alice Springs – as well as in state capitals, and in Wellington, N.Z.

Conferences are very important for ALIA. As well as providing significant income, they bring together people from the many sectors and groups of our multifarious profession. They enable us to keep in touch with each other, socially and professionally. Conferences expose us to new ideas and to different ways of doing things. Getting out is important whatever you are doing, because it puts your own workplace into a larger perspective. If you are going to get out, right out in the middle of Australia turned out to be a pretty good place, amongst hospitable people who were glad to see us all.

What is a conference, anyway? People who evaluate a conference in terms of the quality of papers miss the point. You can read the papers online and a bad paper can fire up your thinking processes as well as a good paper. A conference is a holistic experience, a mixture of lots of different activities—mixing them adds another layer of value, more synergies and connections. A conference includes all this—summary presentations, discussions, full refereed papers in all their stolidity, social events, talking to people you know and don't know; a comprehensive trade exhibition, a chance to sit and think; a stimulus for new ideas, a source of free stationery, and a chance to get out. Not just the papers, at all.

I thought that there were three big themes in the conference.

The first was Indigenous issues in library and information services. There was a wide range of speakers from Professor Martin Nakata, who made a plea for changing the priorities in the first plenary; to Dr Anita Heiss; and the past President of the American Library Association, Dr Lorie

Roy, and many more. There is definitely unfinished business for us from the conference. Librarians have a role in preservation and transmission of Indigenous knowledge, and we need to work out what it is, and do it. The conference gave us a lot of help.

The second was professional issues. There were lots of activities and events. Fellowships were presented to Roxanne Missingham and Christine Mackenzie and other awards were given too. The Hollywood Librarian boosted the library cause. And there was even a stand in the trade exhibition – the Australian Honours and Awards Secretariat – dedicated to encouraging us all to recommend more library people for Australian honours.

The third theme was public libraries. From the Library Stars day on Tuesday, and right through the conference, there was a strong emphasis on public libraries. Several keynote speakers had a public library focus – Claudia Lux, Inga Lunden, and Alan Smith (on the Re-imagining Libraries vision of the national and state libraries). And they were supported by lots of examples of good things being done by public libraries. As we move towards the Public Library Summit in 2009, this all adds to our efforts – Roxanne Missingham's paper provided a backgrounder to the summit and its issues.

So thank you Sonia and Denise for co-convening the conference, and John, Jayshree, Ian, Amy, Nathalie, Philip, Bid and Graeme for organising it. Kamara and everyone from the ALIA National Office, you did a great job.

If you missed the Biennial Conference, never mind. There is a wonderful conference coming up in Melbourne – the 4th ALIA New Librarians Symposium, *Breaking Barriers*. You don't have to be new to go, and you don't have to be rich – it has a bargain price. And then there is Information Online in January, IFLA in Brisbane in 2010 and more.

For me, a last hurrah for the conference was the Hollywood Librarian roadshow, which came to Melbourne on the 11th. The documentary was shown in RMIT's magnificent Capitol Theatre to 300 enthusiastic library people who hadn't been able to make it to the conference, plus me and Ann Steidl and a few who had. Sponsored by four libraries, three library organisations, and three suppliers, it was a hoot – entertaining, inspiring and fun.