



Derek Whitehead

ALIA President

Feedback to your Board of Directors

Board members welcome your comments and feedback. Please feel free to contact a Board member at any time.

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The Conference Season

The conference season will have definitely ebbed by the time this is published. The season starts in spring, and fades away around the end of summer. I wrote about the ALIA Biennial Conference (Alice Springs in September) in October's Frontline. Since then, I have attended several conferences, all of them wonderful, and I am about to attend another.

It is important that we have a strong focus on conferences. In our recent survey of ALIA members, professional development including conferences was the second-most important ALIA service, and the second-highest performing; for young members, conferences came top. About 40% had attended an ALIA conference fairly recently. The only problem members had was a strong feeling that conferences are too expensive. But we are definitely a conferencing profession.

LIANZA – Library and Information Association of New Zealand Aotearoa – is a particular friend of ALIA, our closest sibling professional association. The LIANZA conference, *Poropitia Outside the Box* (2-5 November) was in Auckland at SkyCity, and was "a professional fabulosity" in the words of its master of ceremonies, Dr Greg Morgan.

Quite a few things about the conference, as well as Greg, were outside the box. Instead of a conference dinner, there was a masked ball, which meant that people were not located at specific tables for the night. This seemed to have the effect that people mixed a great deal more, ate less, and possibly drank less.

The conference billed itself as a 'green conference', which meant that no conference satchel was provided, and those attending were invited to bring their own. I brought the superbly-designed Melbourne 2007 EDUCAUSE conference satchel (I was on the conference committee) from my extensive home collection of satchels. BYO satchel seemed to work well.

The conference was cheerful and friendly, with over 500 people attending. It was particularly helpful to me, and many thanks to Alli Smith, who runs LIANZA; Glen Walker, the LIANZA president; Janet Copsey and Brian Pauling of the Library and Information Advisory Council (LIAC) for organising my attendance at the LIAC lunch with Professor Laurence Lessig, the principal conference keynote speaker; and Allison Dopbbie and Ann Reweti for the briefing on the interesting LIANZA registration system.

A month later in Melbourne, it was great to see so many enthusiastic, committed and articulate new librarians at the ALIA New Librarians Symposium 4: *Breaking Barriers* (NLS4). Nearly 300 of them.

NLS4 was upbeat and optimistic, and the major take-home message was that it is a great time for libraries and people who work in them. Especially if we are prepared to learn, adapt and change.

New librarians are at the centre of this. People talk about the crisis in libraries because of the ageing of the workforce. I always say "It's not actually a crisis for everyone, for some it is a marvellous opportunity." An ageing profession is an opportunity for the young. I don't believe in generational stereotyping – we are all in this together, and everyone has to learn, adapt and change – but the reality is that 34.5% of us won't be around in ten years time (one of the speakers said), but most of the NLS attendees will.

It is a great time for libraries because the information environment has changed for the better. And, far from having been obsolesced, said Mark Pesce, a keynote speaker, there are new roles for people with library and information skills, as long as we "get out of the libraries and into the streets."

The conference was a tribute to a very enthusiastic and effective committee, led by Tania Barry, to support from ALIA National Office (in particular Kamara Schlegel) and to sponsors and supporters, vendors and suppliers. It benefited from very articulate new librarians, well-chosen keynote speakers, and enthusiastic and committed new (and newish) librarians and library techs.

Every second January we hold the ALIA Information Online Conference in Sydney's Darling Harbour, and this year Kay Harris and Linden Fairbairn head a talented conference committee. There is also a plethora of satellite events. By the time you read this, ALIA Information Online 2009 will have been a great success – over a thousand registrations as I write. I have enjoyed reading the IOG blog, drip-feeding news of speakers – keynotes and other notes – and watching the preview of the dinner speaker, Peter FitzSimmons.

The conference opens with Senator Stephen Conroy, the Minister for Broadband, Communications and the Digital Economy, and closes with a debate on the subject 'Are we cool enough to attract the Y and Z generations?' Finally, in the last ten minutes of the conference I will have a couple of minutes for a concise but polite attack on generational stereotyping, before I thank everyone.

Up ahead, something completely different. Following the Library Technicians conference in Adelaide – *Technology Technique Unique*, 15-18 September, 2009 – Australia will host its first IFLA conference since 1988 – *Libraries: Engaging Embracing Empowering*, in Brisbane on 15-19 August 2010. You all love conferences, and this will be bigger than anything in the last twenty years. You have to be there.

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