

Frontline



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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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In my rambling to colleagues, National Office staff, and fellow Board members, I often speak about the broad church that is ALIA. ALIA's constituency is obviously geographically dispersed but it is also incredibly diverse in terms of groups, libraries, and services offered.

Of the ALIA 'orders' the most diverse is undoubtedly the group broadly labelled 'specials'. In fact that font of all knowledge, wikipedia, defines a special library as,

a term for a library that is neither an academic nor school library, nor a public library. Special libraries may include law libraries, news libraries, government libraries, corporate libraries, museum libraries, and medical libraries. ... Special libraries often have a more specific clientele than libraries in traditional educational or public settings, and deal with only a specialized or particular type of information. They are developed to support the mission of their sponsoring organization and their collections and services are more targeted and specific to the needs of their clientele. (http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Special_library. Viewed 27/06/2010)

Special libraries also have a number of 'sub-orders', many of which are represented as an ALIA group or they have formed associations in their own right. (It would be great if the groups that have formed independent associations would consider the mutual benefits of being part of ALIA!) As it stands special libraries and those connected with special libraries form a sizeable proportion of ALIA members with 258 institutional members and 692 personal members.

While the term 'special libraries' provides a useful banner of inclusion, many of the libraries that fall into this category are poles apart. Our two special libraries in Rockhampton (there used to be four, but that's another story for another day) amply demonstrate this. One is at Rockhampton Base Hospital servicing the needs of medical, nursing, and allied health staff. Its services, organisation, and operations are pretty much what you would expect for a health library. The other special library in town is at Ergon Energy, Queensland's regional electricity utility. It has a sizeable collection, most of which isn't housed in the main library but in offices and work spaces all over the state. The library also has to maintain and control all the manuals used by field staff wherever they may be – in offices, sheds, and even work trucks. Each library operates differently but each library has a tremendously important role to play in their respective organisations just as other special libraries in different types of organisations are doing all over the country.

As we all know when times are hard and funds are difficult to find, special libraries often fall into the crosshairs of corporate bean counters. In *inCite* April 1998 Deanne Barrett, then President of the ALIA Special Libraries Section wrote of the challenges facing special libraries as we were heading towards the new millennium. I'm sure the issues Deanne raised, such as tight fiscal situations, threats of irrelevancy due to the internet, and outsourcing are just as relevant today as they were in 1998.

At last year's National Advisory Congress there was quite a strong call from library staff working in special libraries for ALIA to advocate strongly in support of special libraries. The Board did take stock of this request in its decision to support the Every Member an Advocate campaign and it will explore other ways of supporting our members from Special Libraries. In order to ensure the needs of special libraries were met by the Association, the Special Libraries Advisory Committee was formed in 2009. One of the committee's first accomplishments has been the revision of the Guidelines for Australian Special Libraries.

By the time you read this, there will only be less than a month to go until ALIA Access 2010 begins in Brisbane on 1 September. Organising a national conference in about 13 months is certainly a whirlwind experience. To get it to the stage where we are has taken a big effort by a relatively small group of people: ALIA National Office staff, ICE – our conference organisers, the conference organising committee, and last but not least the stream convenors. I vividly remember our initial discussions – how will we do it, what will it look like, and most importantly what will it be called. Naming a one edition conference is a bit like naming a child – how will the name be shortened, what image will it portray, has the name been used before, what does the acronym mean. The one good thing about conference naming was that we don't have to worry about gender! Regardless of how we came to the name and what it's called, ALIA Access 2010 promises to be a good conference with some well-documented differences, and, dare I say it, experiments. Although the early bird registration has passed, its still not too late to register. So if you haven't already registered, hop onto the conference website at <http://conferences.alia.org.au/access2010/>. As they say in the ads, "please consider!"

I'm writing this edition of Frontline during the same week of the change of Prime Minister. While everyone thinks Julia Gillard replacing Kevin Rudd is the big news from Canberra, I'm afraid to say that isn't really the case. The really big news is that the Parliamentary Papers Series is to be available electronically via an electronic repository based in the Parliament from the commencement of the 2011 Parliamentary Papers Series. The Joint Committee on Publications tabled its report on an inquiry into the development of a digital repository and electronic distribution of the Parliamentary Series on Thursday 24 June (the very same day Julia replaced Kevin). This outcome was in line with recommendations made by ALIA and other organisations. It's pleasing to see that ALIA contributed to the making of history. Prime Ministers come and go, but Parliamentary Papers go on forever!!

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