

ALIES IN TIMES OF EMERGENCY

ALIES is a library network that collaborates to fulfill the information needs of the emergency sector throughout Australia and New Zealand by exchanging and sharing knowledge, skills and resources, maintaining a distributed Australasian emergency management collection, and providing an expert information service. It is a network that truly represents the evolution of partnerships between libraries and the constituencies they serve.

"A key facet in the changing face of emergency services has been the developing role of libraries and information services. It is not possible for modern emergency services to operate efficiently without professional library support." (Haldane, 1992). This quote is from the proceedings of the *1st Australian Emergency Service Librarians Workshop*, held at Mt Macedon, Victoria in September 1991, an event which marked the beginning of the ALIES (Australasian Libraries in the Emergency Services).

Twenty years later, the ALIES acronym (pronounced 'allies') remains the same; however it now stands for Australasian Libraries in the Emergency Sector, a change that reflects an increased awareness of the interdependencies of the emergency response agencies with other government agencies.

In keeping with the Prevention Preparedness Response Recovery (PPRR) framework, ALIES members have actively engaged in broadening the membership base of the network to reflect a 'whole-of-agencies' and 'all-hazards' approach to emergency management. Membership of the network has increased from 30 libraries in 1991 to 47 libraries in 2011.

Through the annual ALIES Conference, staff of member libraries gain professional development opportunities, broaden their focus and increase their knowledge in information management principles and practices. These meetings also help strengthen networks, build partnerships and increase knowledge of the roles and interrelationships of parent organizations, facilitating coordinated sharing and dissemination of information throughout the Australian and New Zealand emergency and safety sector.

The 2011 ALIES Conference, titled *Celebrating the Past, Creating the Future*, marked the 20th anniversary of the formation of ALIES. A highlight of this conference was a panel presentation by five founding members.

"It must have been about October 1990, as I had only been working at the Melbourne Fire Brigade for three months," Nina McPherson said in her opening address, when she and Coralie Jenkins from the Country Fire Authority Library went to visit Rob Fleming, who had been the librarian at the Australian Counter Disaster College for years.

"We were both greenhorns in this new world. The *InMagic* software had just been installed in our libraries. Thinking back, it was an element of luck that ALIES was formed. So here is the big 'why?' 'Wouldn't it be a good idea?' said Coralie during our visit as we sat talking about the workshops that were held here. When Rob explained that the Commonwealth funded the workshops, almost



Five originals marking 20 years of service (LtoR): Jill North, Margaret Dawson, Kerry Johannes, Nina McPherson, Anne Pickles with a picture of the participants at the original conference in 1991.



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in unison we asked, "how about the emergency services librarians? Couldn't a workshop be held here, for them?"

"Why not?" was Rob's reply. And that's how it all started."

Recurring issues have emerged over these 20 years, many familiar to the greater library community. These include such issues as marketing your library, proving its worth, resilience, and keeping up with changing technology. In line with latest technological trends, the 2011 Conference included a captivating presentation by Professor Scott

Phelps on the ten most important books in the field of emergency management. The session was presented via Skype from JFK Airport in New York.

ALIES today is recognised as part of the National Capability Framework and has proved itself as a resilient voluntary government network. At the 2010 Conference, Mr. Martin Studdert of the Attorney General's Department emphasised the importance of the ALIES Network and its role within the emergency sector. He declared that ALIES makes a difference, breaking down cultural barriers and providing "a shared stream of information... to share around the community... which leads to resilience".

ALIES has influenced the broader emergency management sphere such as the National Spatial and Information Management Working Group and the Australian Fire Authority Council Knowledge Web. This is due to the hard work and commitment of individuals from member libraries. Librarians don't shout - they reach out and quietly make an impact.

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Postscript:

Members of ALIES would like to pay tribute to the former Library Manager of the Australian Institute of Criminology, Janet Smith, who worked tirelessly to progress and promote the work of ALIES. Janet sadly passed away January 2011. She is greatly missed.