

EBOOKS AND ELENDING: WHERE WE ARE NOW



Back row – Margaret Allen (State Library WA), Jane Cowell (State Library QLD). Second row – Alan Smith (State Library SA), Geoff Stempel (Public Library Services SA). Front row – John Murrell (Public Libraries Victoria Network), Marie-Louise Ayers (National Library of Australia), Julie Rae (ALIA President), Christine Mackenzie (Public Libraries Victoria Network).

With business models in a state of flux, libraries at odds with publishers, and emotions running high in the book industry, it has been difficult to reach a consensus about where libraries are now in relation to ebooks and elending, and how we should go forward. As the peak body for library and information professionals, this has been our challenge and we have tackled it in a number of ways.

International

IFLA brought out its Background paper on elending in 2012 and we have factored this thinking into our own response to ebooks and elending. We have also been monitoring the news from the US and UK, where most of the elending dramas have been played out, and from New Zealand, where there are similar issues to our own around access to home-produced content by local authors.

We are watching with interest developments in Douglas County, California and Canada, where moves are afoot for the library services to develop their own elending platforms, and will be meeting with colleagues at the IFLA conference in Singapore this month to find out more about these initiatives.

National

The federal government's Book Industry Collaborative Council ended its one year existence on 30 June 2013. We are awaiting its final report, but we have been closely involved with the work of three of its expert reference groups – those covering copyright, skills and elending. This latter group has produced a set of principles for elending, which are carefully constructed

to reflect the differing goals of the different stakeholders, primarily authors, publishers and libraries. It will be up to libraries at state/territory and local level to interpret these broad principles in the context of their own local environment.

ALIA

Late last year ALIA constructed an issues paper, bringing together what was happening internationally with our Australian experience and covering ebooks and elending in the context of public, school, academic and special libraries. This issues paper formed the basis for our think tanks in Brisbane, Perth and Melbourne, which together involved more than 300 interested participants.

We followed up with a position paper, summarising Australian libraries' approach to the issues and the Association's contribution. Our position was debated at the think tank in Sydney, which attracted close to 100 delegates.

The third piece of collateral has been a business case built around the concept of a 'buy-it-now' button on library management systems, an idea first raised at the Adelaide think tank. We have calculated that this would create a new \$56 million route to market for authors and publishers. Details are on the ALIA website.

What comes next?

Moving ahead, there are a number of activity strands for ALIA and our partners to pursue.

- We are maintaining a close eye on the activities of US and Canadian libraries around the development of new elending platforms.

- We are looking at an advocacy position statement based on a 50:50 print and ebooks scenario in public and school libraries in 10 years' time (with reference book tending to be more 'e' and children's picture books more 'p').
- We are identifying any gaps in information and resources that our members need – for example simple briefing sheets for councils, principals and management.
- We are developing the business case for libraries and entering into discussions about the 'buy-it-now' button with authors, publishers and library management systems suppliers.
- We are engaged with other book industry stakeholders in helping to define what sort of joint forum is needed now that the work of the Book Industry Collaborative Council has ended.

We will keep you posted about advances with the ebooks and elending agenda through INCITE, ALIA Weekly and our website.

We would like to take this opportunity to say thank you to Margaret Allen, CEO of the State Library of WA, who has spoken at all five think tanks and shared her unparalleled knowledge of the issues facing libraries all around the globe, to our ebooks and elending reference group, to the State Librarians of NSW, South Australia and Victoria for providing venues for our think tanks, to the Council of Australian University Librarians for providing speakers to address the academic position, to speakers from other stakeholder groups, including those from special libraries, and those with a special interest in people with print disabilities, indexing, interlibrary loans and copyright, to library vendors and other stakeholders, with special mentions for Paul Haasz from Overdrive and Patricia Genat from Australian Library Supplies (ALS), who have contributed greatly to the discussion, and to our members who have attended the events and shared their experiences.

More information

ALIA issues paper, position paper, business case, think tank presentations and resources: www.alia.org.au/advocacy-and-campaigns/advocacy-campaigns/ebooks-and-elending.

IFLA Background Paper on Elending: www.ifla.org/publications/background-paper-on-e-lending-2012.

State Library of WA ebooks advocacy site: ebookadvocacy.wordpress.com/about.

NSW.net elending portal: www.nswnet.net/elending-portal.