

LIBRARY BUSINESS

A day in the life of ALIA's CEO may include many things, among them queries from members of the public about how libraries operate and the responsibilities they have to their communities.

Recently, ALIA CEO Sue McKerracher was contacted by library user Stephen Lake from Melbourne, who expressed his concern about books in his local library which could potentially mislead naïve investors.

Stephen had previously put his concerns to his local library. The library's response outlined their collection policy to 'provide a representative collection on all subjects of interest to the community, with the exception of items prohibited by law' and also referenced ALIA's Statement of Free Access to

Information, advising Stephen it was up to individual borrowers how they choose to use information available to them.

Sue spoke with Stephen about access to information and the Association's core values, including free access to information. Stephen followed up with this letter so *INCITE* readers can read firsthand about his frustrations.

The *Statement of Free Access to Information* is just one of the professional and advocacy resources available to members via the ALIA website. ALIA's guidelines and policies cover topics including education and qualifications, library and information services, professional issues, school libraries and teacher librarians, research, values and ethics, and the workplace. Find them at www.alia.org.au/about-alia/policies-standards-and-guidelines.

Dear ALIA,

My library has a book by an author of questionable morals and competence. The author writes about investment, with a focus on gloom, always predicting crashes, recessions and corrections. Sometimes he's right; it's said that he predicted 12 of the last eight such events. Nearly all my income is from investing, and I've been investing for 29 years.

The ethical problem is that he uses gloom to sell, which would seem to be mainly to those that do not know much about investing. Unfortunately, the media do not ask critical questions of this writer, and published puff pieces and advertorial material as supplied. The financially unwashed saw these, panicked and bought the book. Not good.

Libraries acquire books in good faith, relying to a large extent on publisher information, and perhaps the press. The difficulty is that with a lot of books being bought and a range of call numbers, libraries cannot be expected to know all subjects and vet every book. Staff at my main library are terrific, and have on my recommendation changed a few things, like taking some very dated books out and adding notes at the front: some information does not work in or apply to Australia. This is not just due to differing views, but safety and peer review.

A library would not stock a book on how to make a bomb, explosive reading. Noddy Goes to Town is fine; he enjoyed the trip. The spectrum is skewed, with nearly all books acceptable, if not something that most people would agree with, like Mein Kampf or the Communist Manifesto.

The degree to which libraries should vet books with a view to identifying questionable authors is vexatious and lacks an easy answer. Probably the easiest way is to use a search engine to look at bad things. This could take the form <subject> critic/ adverse/ problem /complaint/ etc. I do this most days and often find many bad things. Another option may be to have a community panel which can be tapped to provide advice. Such a panel could have experts from most and hopefully all areas, aircraft maintenance to zebra grooming, but not bomb-making.

Stephen Lake
Melbourne