



GETTING AHEAD OF THE GAME

I was ALIA President almost 20 years ago. They were challenging times, but in retrospect seem to have been halcyon days. At that time, we were worried about the image of librarians and the future of the profession. Much of our concern centred on the change from print to electronic publication. Papers at library conferences alternatively lamented the change or extolled the opportunities.

Pessimists forecast the end of the profession, the demise of print publication and the annihilation of libraries. More optimistic commentators recognised the challenges but also the need to grasp and direct change. Time has proven the optimists partially correct. Libraries and librarians are still here, and print publishing continues.

Nonetheless, the library environment has changed and will continue to evolve. As a profession, we need to continue to take the offensive to ensure that libraries and library professionals are still here and thriving in another 20 years.

I'm pleased to be ALIA President again. It gives me an opportunity to give back to a profession that gave me so much.

My career would not have been as successful and pleasurable without the support of colleagues. Being able to rely on the advice and support of other Members of the profession got me through some difficult times. I was always conscious of the old adage – united we stand, divided we fall. One of the benefits of belonging to ALIA is the combined knowledge, influence and experience of everyone in the Association. The trick is knowing how to access that wisdom and energy and how to use them to the greatest effect.

In late 2014, ALIA established the FAIR campaign to lobby for Freedom of Access to Information and Resources. FAIR has had some successes already, and during the coming year will continue to engage with a range of issues as they arise. FAIR will also be taking a strategic approach

to issues that are basic to the continuing role and value of libraries in our communities. ALIA needs to identify systemic issues, be active in bringing them to the fore, and have well thought out responses. Waiting until there is a crisis is often too late to be effective.

Another focus of my term as President will be on ALIA as an organisation. There are a number of challenges to be faced, including a slowly diminishing membership. As the number of libraries decreases, fewer people are employed in the sector. Libraries are hiring staff to meet the new and emerging demands of their users. Often the new staff have qualifications and skills not traditionally associated with libraries.

ALIA as an organisation needs to look at its membership base and identify ways of encouraging people to join. Currently, we only have about 15% of the profession as Members. We will also be looking at the financial and organisational operation of the Association. ALIA is in good financial health, but we need to continue to assess our ongoing liabilities and minimise their future effects.

I'm looking forward to meeting as many ALIA Members as possible over the coming year. A lot has changed since my last time in the job, but many of the issues are the same. Our profession has the capacity to make an even greater contribution to the economic, social and intellectual health of our communities. We just need to recognise those opportunities, develop the rationale for libraries being involved, and promote ourselves.

Best wishes for a bright future.

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ALIA President

