



COMBINED EFFORT = SUCCESS

It is always a thrill to see members of our profession recognised publicly for their achievements. I was particularly pleased that Kerry Smith has been made a Member of the Order of Australia. Kerry has been a consistent advocate for librarianship and library education over a very long time.

Yes, some of that effort was related to her academic position at Curtin University. Mostly, though, it was due to Kerry's strongly held belief that libraries and librarians matter and that they provide services essential to education and to community wellbeing. Kerry has been a great advocate for the profession and much of her endeavour has been on her own time.

Large industries and trade organisations often engage professional lobbyists to advocate their causes, especially to government. Others, like Tourism Australia, depend on expensive publicity campaigns. They have the resources to produce glitzy advertisements and to employ celebrities to sing their praises. Smaller businesses and not-for-profit organisations have to rely on their own efforts. Many believe that all they need to do is give good service and provide quality products, and the world will be their oyster.

It may work if the business or organisation is in a competition-free niche. Otherwise, the oyster produces no pearls and ultimately results only in ptomaine poisoning. Libraries often fall into this category. We know that what we do is worthwhile and are often shocked when others do not recognise and value that worth.

ALIA has always advocated on behalf of the profession and has done so with great effect. While these efforts may not have immediate or direct benefits for individual members, they strengthen the wider perception of libraries and librarianship. This provides a strong position from which to promote issues and gives the Association a public profile and reputation.

On the page opposite Sue McKerracher has written about the successes of the FAIR campaign, which advocates industry-wide issues. Other recent areas in which the Association has advocated include the Cooking for Copyright and Great School Libraries campaigns.

ALIA constantly responds to government enquiries and reviews that are relevant to libraries, librarians and the information industry. This effort is somewhat like water torture. It has little effect at the start, but continual application yields results. Not all of our advocacy is formal. Some of the best results come from chance meetings with decision makers.

While ALIA has an important role in advocating for the profession, every member also has a role. If we all follow Kerry Smith's example and advocate for the profession at every suitable opportunity, our efforts can be more effective than expensive publicity campaigns. It isn't an easy task and timing is important. Accosting your mayor, vice-chancellor, principal or boss every time you are together in the lift could prove to be counterproductive.

What can we do? Know as much as possible about who has influence and what motivates them. Sometimes it isn't the mayor who will make the decision but some other councillor. A vice-chancellor whose research interest is etymology may be alienated by a spiel about books on Pre-Raphaelite art.

Know as much as possible about the issue you are advocating. Having attained that state of omniscience, distil it to 100 words or less and present your case with conviction. That doesn't mean being overly earnest, humourless or tedious. Lastly, pick the most opportune time to present your case. That might be one-on-one, as part of a meeting, in a casual conversation while exercising at the gym or as a formal written submission. Increasingly, social media is becoming an influential tool for advocacy beyond the profession.

Every member of ALIA can be an advocate and our combined efforts will lead to success. The quality of this success depends on our consistency, enthusiasm and commitment. 

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ALIA President

