The Australian Libraries Summit

- a report by Warren Horton

The Australian Libraries Summit meeting was held at the Lakeside Hotel, Canberra from 16–19 October 1988. It was attended by 135 delegates drawn from across the nation's library services, and was the culmination of a planning process involving widespread consultation in the profession over the last two years.

The Summit's mission statement was 'to determine and reach agreement on the most effective structures and processes for delivering library and information services throughout the nation', and it had the following objectives:
1. To explore the present pattern and possible alternative structures for library and related information services.
2. To explore ways of co–ordinating collection development to create the most comprehensive possible national collection and of establishing agreements to achieve this process.
3. To consider proposals leading to a plan for improved access to the national collection.
4. To identify the roles of various kinds of libraries and related information services in achieving objectives 2 and 3.
5. To explore ways of improving public awareness and capacity to use information resources available through the nation's libraries and related information services.
6. To agree on a process for implementing the conclusions reached at the Summit.

The Summit planning process and the final agenda was organised by a Steering Committee whose members were Jenny Adams, Peter Dawe, Jim Dwyer, Derek Fielding, Warren Horton, Anthony Ketley, Boyd Rayward, Denis Richardson, Bob Sharman (until his recent retirement), and Diana Southwell. The National Library provided funds for the planning process, notably through a major donation by Mr Ken Myer, but the Steering Committee had full responsibility for the Summit itself. Mr Clyde Holding, MP, Commonwealth Minister for Arts and Territories opened the Summit on the morning of 17 October and in doing so expressed his intention to closely consider its resolutions and his view that they would obviously be of interest to other governments. Senator Bob McMullan had spoken at the opening dinner on the previous evening, and his timely comments on the political process, lobbying and the need for realistic priorities gave a strong thrust to the subsequent debates.

The Summit made major advances towards the better development of the nation's library services in the interests of their users, notably through agreement reached by delegates on major issues on the agenda. This was in no small part due to the fact that it was chaired magnificently by Margaret Trask. The NLA expects to publish the full *Record of the Summit* by mid–December, and all delegates have already been supplied with the agreed text of the resolutions.

Since the discussion papers and agenda for the Summit were very widely distributed, many readers are already aware of the detailed agenda for the Summit which had been decided by the Steering Committee after the initial round of consultations. The following comments summarise debate on some of them, and are loosely based upon the speech given by me at a National Press Club luncheon attended by Summit delegates and others on the final day of the meeting. Unfortunately the combination of SBS's funding problems and that day's balance-of -payments announcement meant this speech was not widely reported.

National collection

In discussing the key issue of co–ordinating the development of and access to the national collection, the Summit accepted an objective of ensuring an appropriate collection of resources, adequately recorded and accessible for the benefit of all Australians. It was resolved that such a national collection should be based on principles of a distributed national collection which is the aggregation of all library collections in Australia whether in the public or private sector, comprehensive in relation to Australia and selective in relation to the rest of the world as present and future needs require. It was agreed that the national collection had to be adequately recorded and readily accessible, and the Summit then reached agreement on nine detailed recommendations to achieve this. These include resolutions that institutions whose collections are of significance to the national collection develop and publish collection policy statements within a defined timeframe, that libraries whose collections are of significance to the national collection commit themselves to use the RLG Conspectus approach to analysing their collections and formulating collection development policies and that research libraries investigate and pursue collection rationalisation initiatives in selected areas and make this information available.

It was further agreed that a national working party representative of the National, CSIRO and State Libraries, CAUL, ALCAE and other appropriate libraries and agencies be established in conjunction with the NLA and ACLIS to determine an Australian version of Conspectus by September 1989, and to conduct a pilot test of the method determined and then recommend priorities for application. The NLA has been requested to accept responsibility for mounting an Australian version of RLG Conspectus online in two years.

Preservation

The Summit also reached agreement on a strategy for preservation priorities for Australian libraries, based on ACLIS finalising the major work already done by ALIC on conservation in Australian libraries and archives authorities in consultation with the Australian Council of Archives.

Other resolutions include requests to the NLA to set up a National Preservation Office, to all State Libraries to set up State Committees or appropriate alternative mechanisms on

Delegates to the Australian Libraries Summit held in Canberra from 16-19 October 1988.

was resolved that ACLIS should be asked to establish a taskforce to develop a national plan for improving access to information for remote users, and that in the preparation of the plan the taskforce consider all the issues already raised and materials submitted to the Summit. The plan should include specific proposals as to how its various recommendations should be funded, including the possibility of private sector funding, and should give special attention to recommendations which involved little or no extra funding but a re-thinking of policies or priorities for remote users.

Public libraries

The Summit adopted eight resolutions concerning public libraries and the Australian libraries and information system. Recognising that the public library provides resources and services designed to meet the information, education, cultural and recreational needs of the community, it was agreed that the primary responsibility of the public library should be to serve as the first point of access for information for the general public to the national system of library and information services.

Specific recommendations include a request to the LAA to publish national public library standards by June 1989, a request to the State Librarians Council to establish the national statistical database for state and public libraries presently under consideration and resolutions that state/territory library authorities in consultation with local government authorities should be responsible for an evaluation and planning programme for all public libraries in their state/territory which relates performance measures to service priorities and budget strategies in the light of the primary role identified above.

The Summit also unanimously recognised that an effective public library system depends on a strong funding partnership by the three levels of government, and called on state governments to redress inadequacies in fundings and the federal government to accept its responsibility in this partnership, particularly where federal government policies (eg multicultural services, Aboriginal and Islander policies) impinge on public library services.

User pays

The most controversial issue debated at the Summit was that of the user-pays principle and the public library. This had the objective of reaching a common position on guidelines for user-pays in view of continuing government pressure at all levels for charging for services. The Summit resolved:

That given this Summit's resolution that it is the responsibility of the public library to serve as the first point of access to information for the general public and for the public's access to the national system of library and information services, basic public library services should remain free of charge. This reflects the concept of a distinction between basic services which are free and add-on services for which a charge may be made.

It was further resolved that the concept of 'add-on'/'value added'/'enhanced' services required further development before it can become the basis upon which users are charged for certain library services, and ACLIS and the LAA have been asked to address this issue as a matter of urgency. Anyone with a particular interest in this matter is urged to obtain a copy of the text of the report for Session L of the Summit from a delegate or the NLA.

School libraries

The Summit debated the topic of a national strategy for school libraries, and resolved that the LAA and ASLA should work with the appropriate education authorities and other bodies to develop a national policy on information literacy by 1990 in time for active participation by school libraries in the International Literacy Year and the Year of the Reader. The eleven other resolutions concerning school libraries address issues including equity of access to information for school communities, the development by the LAA and ASLA of strategies for school libraries to participate in the development and use of the national collection and of appropriate databases, the need for performance indicators within the context of the National Agenda for Education and the implementation of a common approach to the collection of statistics.

This is of necessity a very selective report on the Summit. It does not mention for example the sessions on national guidelines for technology, access to Australian information data in electronic form, education for library and information services and the co-ordination of library and information services in Australia.

The Summit Steering Committee met on 20 October, and for all recommendations decided the organisations they should be referred to and the deadline and priorities for action. This information is given in the text of the agreed resolutions recently sent to all Summit delegates, and will also be in the full *Record*.

We now have an agreed broad agenda for the better development of library services to the people of Australia. The test of our effectiveness will now be how well this is taken up by the LAA, ACLIS, ASLA and other bodies and libraries responsible for its implementation, and how well we sell it to the key decision makers in the Australian community.

Warren Horton
Chair
Summit Steering Committee

library clerical support time were voiced. The meeting also examined the necessity to provide adequate support in the OASIS training program through personnel who have teacher–librarian skills.

The current status of *Information Skills K–12* document was discussed, the Minister's staff indicating the timetable for its current reworking. The point was made that release of the document either late this year or early next year would confirm the direction of many school library programs of recent years, and provide a much-needed boost to the morale of many teacher–librarians.

The potential loss to schools of teacher–librarians with both training and experience as a result of changes to the employment of staff as supply casuals was discussed, along with the necessity, from the Association's viewpoint, that the Department of Education provide training for classroom teachers who may find themselves working in school libraries as teacher–librarians in 1989.

The meeting concluded with the tabling of a document prepared by the LAA School Libraries Section which looks at the issue of teacher–librarians and promotion opportunities within the NSW Department of Education. It is to be hoped that this document will form the basis for ongoing negotiations with the Minister on this issue.

A report on the meeting will be prepared by the Minister's staff for presentation to him. The School Libraries Section (NSW Group) has submitted information detailing its position on the issues discussed, in particular on the question of the use of supply casuals. The Association looks to the continuation of the negotiation process that have been developed with the Government since its election in order to support the position of teacher–librarians as information professionals.

Murray McLachlan
Vice President

CENTRAL WESTERN REGIONAL GROUP NSW

Oliver Twist reborn

Dubbo was the venue for the third meeting of the Central Western Regional Group (NSW), on 28 October 1988. The new Macquarie Regional Library provided the location and the topic was 'Oliver Twist reborn — putting a case to the administrators'. Two speakers, Warwick Goodsir, Orana regional director of TAFE; and Christine Henderson, University of NSW librarian addressed the question from the administrator's and librarian's viewpoint respectively. A panel of three librarians from the region led discussions with examples from their own experience.

Emphasis was laid on the need to supply useful data and performance measures. Christine stressed the importance of planning, lobbying support, recognition of successes and lessons drawn from setbacks.

We were pleased to welcome Mairead Browne in her capacity of President, NSW Branch. A short formal meeting was attended by 24 members and was followed by a dinner.

The territory of this Regional Group stretches from Lithgow to Bourke and the meetings rotate to assist attendance. The first meeting for 1989 will be in March or April when it is hoped LIBNET will be demonstrated.

Margaret McPherson
President

CHILDREN'S LIBRARIES SECTION NSW GROUP

Nancy Booker Honour Lecture

On Wednesday, 26 October, the 1988 Nancy Booker Honour Lecture was held at the Australian Museum of Childhood at Historic Juniper Hall, Paddington.

Surrounded by superb prints and originals by Australian childrens' book illustrators between 1857–1988, Robert Holden, Curator of the Museum, delivered a lecture which provided a critical analysis of individual artists' works, and commenting on the personal influences affecting artistic style. Regarded somewhat as a Cinderella occupation among the arts, children's book illustration is at last receiving due recognition as a highly developed and unique form of artistic endeavour — a fact not lost upon those attending auctions where high prices are being realised.

Robert Holden followed on from his lecture with a tour of 'Koalas, Kangaroos and Kookaburras', a delightful exhibition sponsored by James Hardie Industries. For the many children's librarians and art lovers attending, Robert Holden's lecture/tour, and in-depth understanding of the visual delights of childhood, as they are displayed at Juniper Hall, struck a real chord with young and old alike.

Sue Parkinson
Vice-President

CATALOGUERS SECTION SA GROUP

Garbage in, Garbage out!

The 8th National Cataloguing Conference will be held in Adelaide, South Australia from 14–16 September 1989.

Through its theme: 'Garbage in, Garbage out! The need for quality in the age of automation' the conference will address issues relating to quality, and the implication for users, cataloguers and institutions. It will also deal with lower standards, the sacrifice of quality for quantity and the constraints of local systems and shared databases. A call for papers has been sent to all Sections and will expire on the 31 January 1989.

Anticipated topics include user viewpoints, standards of source data, constraints of local systems — the end of quality cataloguing, constraints and requirements of institutions, problems of retro conversions, and training of new cataloguers.

For details please contact: Conference convener, 8th National Cataloguing Conference, Festival City Conventions, PO Box 986, Norwood, SA 5067 or on (08) 269 4663 and (08) 339 2975.

Philip Keane
President