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NEWSLETTER OF THE AUSTRALIAN LIBRARY AND INFORMATION ASSOCIATION

THE LIBRARY BOARD
- 6 DEC 1989

Cryptic statistics

A plan for a national statistical database on libraries, using data to be collected by the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS), was initiated by the Council of Cultural Ministers earlier this year. The Council appointed a Statistical Advisory Group (SAG) to prepare the 'Statistical Framework for the Culture and Leisure Industry'. Libraries are defined as one of its nine sub-sectors. In *InCite* 10(7), 22 May 1989, Andy Exon (Research and Planning, Curtin University of Technology Library, Perth) gave an outline of SAG activities and progress, and voiced concerns and reservations held by members of the library community. In this issue, Colin Steele reports on the third workshop and meeting held recently at the National Library of Australia (NLA), the difficulties encountered, and the action to be taken.

A meeting of NLA, ACLIS and ALIA representatives just before the main meeting took the view that the document as it stood was so damaging that not to amend it would be counter-productive. They worked through the day to remove the worst anomalies in all sectors — for example, tables on school libraries were erroneous; in national and State library figures, enquiries and interlibrary loans were added to make one table; University library figures juxtaposed monograph acquisition and serial holdings etc.

Sectoral representatives also agreed to revise the sector tables as far as possible, which involved much work. The brief in the short time available was — as Anthony Ketley from NLA put it — to:

- eliminate or correct inaccuracies;
- eliminate the tendentious and

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Sagging consultation processes

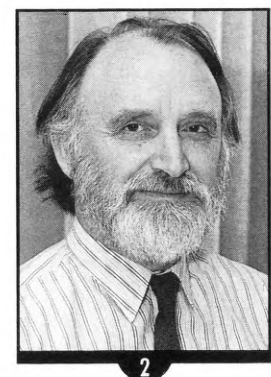
Representatives at the meeting — including NLA and Australian Council of Library and Information Services (ACLIS) representatives — expressed coordinated concern at the consultation process.

Ian Smith, the principal member of SAG, apologised for the misunderstandings, but said that the two 'major framework' volumes had been sent out for earlier comment and 'must have been lost in the post'. Then he indicated that his comments on the workshop draft had to be returned to him by the following Friday (27 October) so that the revised document could be circulated for widespread comment to the profession with a deadline of 31 January 1990. (The final document is being presented to the Cultural Ministers' Council in May 1990.)

The group decided it had been placed in an almost impossible position by SAG, and that their concerns would have to be passed on in other forums.



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1 Colin Steele

2 Anthony Ketley

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unnecessary parts of the commentary and analysis; and

- insert some new comments intended to provide a sounder framework for the statistical analysis.

To those not involved, the above and its background may all seem a little cryptic, particularly as the documents supplied by SAG have not been seen by most of the profession. Indeed, all of the librarians involved in Canberra, except for Anthony Ketley, had only 1—3 days notice of their role in determining the nature of a draft of a library statistical overview that can be used positively or negatively by ministers, funding authorities etc.!

The Canberra group concentrated on the workshop papers, rather than commenting on changing the relevant sections of the 'blue and red books', as there will be time for this in the further consultation period. Nonetheless there are important changes to be made here within the framework of creators, products, organisations and consumers,

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which is how the hierarchical framework is organised.

The involvement of ABS has meant that re-defining the culture and leisure industries in a more recognisable information mode is virtually impossible. However, some changes can be made in the general ASCO codes, which we believe are being circulated.

The profession will still have to keep its own detailed statistics. These could be recognised by ABS, as the latter as a matter of policy does not intend to identify component parts whose libraries are part of parent institutions — for example, libraries of higher education bodies or special libraries.

If the positive side of the exercise can be reflected through the traumas and frustration of the gestation period, we will have a library-wide set of statistics and commentaries from all sectors, which previously did not exist or were only slowly being worked on. The 'threat' from outside may thus be beneficial.

Library representatives attending the workshop at NLA, in addition to SAG members, were:

ALIA and universities, CAEs:

Colin Steele (ANU) and Lois Jennings (CCA)

TAFE: *Mary Smith (NSW TAFE)*

ACLIS: *Gordon Bower*

Public: *Helen Woodward (SLNSW)*

ACT Library Services: *Charumati Sood*
Schools: *Trish Wilkes (ACT Education Authority)*

Special: *Sandra Duffield (NLA), for information on federal libraries.*

NLA: *Anthony Ketley*

Given the difficulties of consultation and coordination of documentation, NLA has agreed to coordinate the national response working with ALIA and ACLIS. Copies will be made available from these groups. I urge ALIA members, and certainly sections, to make themselves aware of the documents. Since the Cultural Ministers' Council requires a response by 31 January in final coordinated form, NLA, ALIA and ACLIS have put a deadline of 15 December on responses.

Colin Steele
University Librarian
Australian National University



I would suggest that national ACLIS and ALIA General Councils organise a joint meeting next year and that very clear boundaries are agreed for areas of activity for the next 2–3 years. If ALIA's members indicate that spending money on lobbying materials such as Information for the Nation is acceptable, then could ACLIS spend its money on an activity not covered by ALIA, or vice versa?

In any case, what is all this lobbying for? More money? Governments these days are not in the business of providing money for 'good things' in general. Quite rightly, they require specific projects with specific outcomes, and these are planned through the budgeting process.

More recognition? By whom? As what? ALIA and ACLIS both have the word 'information' in their titles, but they are essentially library based and the materials being produced are library oriented. As long as we are seen as either recreational or educational, we will find it difficult to break out of the traditional mould to be seen as vital to the effective and efficient management of government, business and the general community.

There is little doubt in my mind that there is a rift forming in the library world. It seems to me that every chief librarian should support ALIA. A strong professional association is necessary for any industry group. Continuing education, professional standards, conferences and seminars, publishing, newsletters, etc. are all valid activities and cannot be provided by other organisations. To hear any senior librarian (and I have heard a few) criticise ALIA in such a way as to persuade staff not to participate is very disappointing.

On the other hand, ACLIS will only survive if these same senior librarians support it. But it needs to be more broadly based, gain more public librarians, and maybe more special librarians. The more issues like user pays are kept on the boil, the more the sectional interests will prevail and the less effective ACLIS will be. ACLIS has no authority. It governs nothing.

Thus consultation, negotiation, persuasion and consensus — with resulting cooperative mechanisms that collectively benefit the people of Australia (not the institutions who join or who run it) without penalising specific groups — must surely be the order of the day. If no consensus can be reached, then no statement should be made. Any issue can remain unresolved — there is no need to have agreement on everything, and it is unrealistic to

produce statements that are agreed to by some institutions only.

As incoming President, I would hope that ALIA would continue to work closely with ACLIS to determine where joint action is appropriate, to accept that some issues are best handled by only one group, and to agree that some issues do not need a national thrust. Why not focus on exciting topics like: What are we going to do to capitalise on 2001 celebrations?

The end result I would like to see is:

- a clear definition of mutually exclusive and joint roles of ALIA and ACLIS;
- support mechanisms in the various bodies to keep communication channels open;
- a focusing on external productive issues whose social outcomes can be clearly argued and understood by those who fund our operations;
- the identification of issues and the preparation of joint advice to bodies like the Cultural Ministers Council, SAG etc.;
- the creation of a spirit of cooperation rather than subdued implied confrontation.

With ALIA and ACLIS Executives both now located in Canberra, it would seem to me that it would be a pity for anything other than close cooperation to be the order of the day — but cooperation that is translated into tangible benefits for the people of Australia.

Lynn Allen
Vice-President, ALIA





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