

# FRONT LINE



Lynn Allen — Vice-President, ALIA

**W**hen considering an appropriate topic for Frontline close to the start of my presidential year, I was conscious of choosing one that would not only be relevant to this moment in time, but would also set some overall direction and objectives for 1990 — such as issues that could be resolved in that timeframe.

The question that has troubled me for some months keeps ringing in my ears: what is going on in Australian

librarianship at the moment? Are we witnessing the suicide of a united profession, or are there a few people perceiving a better future and we should follow their leads? I don't have the answers, but the topic is worth exploring.

There is a range of issues which seem designed — either through bad luck or good management — to cause discord within the library industry. They are absorbing much of our collective professional energy by focusing on what are essentially self-centred matters. These include the apparent fostering of antagonism between ACLIS and ALIA, the user-pays issue, the responsibility for the promotion of libraries, and the discussions over lobbying methods.

There are many groups in the information industry — the Australian Society of Archivists, the Records Management Association of Australia, the Australian Computer Society and so on — each representing specific, identifiable sectors. Yet libraries seem to need multiple groups — ALIA, ACLIS, ASLA, State Librarians' Council and CAUL, to name but a few. The objectives of these groups seem similar and so we face the possibility of duplication, and — what's worse — the dispersion of energies into intraprofes-

sional issues rather than client-oriented activities.

If we look at ALIA and ACLIS from the point of view of objectives and current activities, both would seem to be in the business of:

- promoting libraries;
- speaking on policy matters to bodies like the Cultural Ministers Council;
- lobbying;
- publishing;
- conducting research;
- developing standards.

ALIA has discussed the need to conduct some strategic planning, and this is essential. However, if the Association then comes to the conclusion that its strategies are the same as ACLIS's, where are we? I am left wondering about the need for two organisations, but I am not going to suggest their combination. This has been argued elsewhere and to continue such an argument is to do the very thing I think is wasting time, namely too much navel gazing and not enough client focus. So, if both ALIA and ACLIS are to remain on the scene for the short term at least, it seems to me that some kind of joint strategic planning is needed.

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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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