

# Letters

## NQ — Group or Branch?

### Dear Editor,

As President of the North Queensland Regional Group of ALIA, I was pleased to see the front page of *inCite* (25 March 1991). Such prominence for the discussion of our request for autonomy is to be applauded. This Group believes that the issues involved affect all members, not just those in North Queensland.

I would like to restate that this is not just a request for increased funds. The problem is simply that Regional Group members, because of distance, are precluded from having any realistic involvement with Branch activities. This is in no way a criticism of the Queensland Branch. This Group believes that the Branch is well managed and provides excellent service to its members. However, it is just not possible for any Branch to provide that same level of service from 1300 km away. This distance, from Brisbane to Cairns, is the same as from Brisbane to Melbourne.

In requesting the establishment of a North Queensland Branch, we do not wish to play a secessionist role. We strongly believe that this move would be good for the Association. Bringing a Branch structure to this region would promote participation and involvement. With increased representation and increased resources, a more active recruitment program would be possible. Increased membership in North Queensland and hence a greater income to the Association, would benefit all members of ALIA.

Perhaps, as our President suggested, it is time to have a fresh look at the structure of ALIA. In order to remain viable, organisations must be continually evolving. We strongly support the Association's growth and see this request as a part of that healthy evolution.

*Suzie Davies*  
President

North Queensland Regional Group

## From the Central Western Regional Group

### Dear Editor,

The discussion on Regional Groups has prompted the following comments on

behalf of this Regional Group.

Firstly, the 1991 Regional Group Committee discussed the role of our Group and we agreed that we try to do three things: provide the opportunity for members to have informal contact with other libraries (our activities always have a 'social' component); arrange activities and functions to assist with members' professional development and to keep them informed on current professional issues; and provide members with a link to ALIA.

Secondly, the Committee has identified a number of problems which Regional Groups face, or at least ours does. One problem is the geographic dispersal of our members across a very large area. It does not matter where in the region activities are held, attendance by some members requires travelling for several hours. Another difficulty is trying to take into account the range of sizes and types of libraries from which our members come when deciding on activities to run. Our Group includes members from school, special, public, and college and university libraries. Another problem is the lack of know-how of most committee members when it comes to actually presenting activities in an interesting and relevant way so that members will feel there is enough value to be gained for the often considerable effort necessary to attend. Perhaps this is an area where ALIA may be able to help by offering practical assistance in planning activities and advising how to make them really 'hum'.

Thirdly, your letter mentions the case put by the North Queensland Regional Group for Branch status. I raised this at a recent Regional Group meeting and there was some useful discussion of it. No-one spoke in favour of putting such a case for our own Regional Group, and quite a few objections to such a move were voiced. These included concern that such a move would re-focus the efforts of the committee on more administrative type functions and hence reduce the time they would have to look after members' needs. It was also felt that it may be much more difficult to attract people to take on office because there would (presumably) be considerably more demands on office bearers in a Branch than in a Regional Group. The cost of such a move to ALIA members in the form of increased membership fees was also questioned. It was also mentioned that ALIA is really quite a small association and that there is a danger of its structure becoming more complex than is necessary. Members found it difficult to see how Branch status would really benefit them. Some suggested that the money and effort that would be needed would be better spent by ALIA maintaining and increasing its practical support and

services to Regional Groups, such as continuing to fund ALIA staff to attend Regional Group meetings, assisting with planning activities and so on.

*Marilyn Hawkett*

President/Secretary

Central Western Regional Group

## The conspectus exchange continues

### Dear Editor,

At the risk of appearing to be attempting to set a record for an exchange of views in your columns, Eric Wainwright's 'last (?)' contribution to our protracted debate on conspectus contains misleading statements that I cannot let pass unnoticed.

Eric did me the courtesy of sending me an advance copy, for comment, of his paper on conspectus to the ALIA Perth Conference. In my reply to him I pointed out that I could not be present at his session because I was committed to another session at the same time. Similarly anyone who knew anything about my involvement in the behind the scenes work for this conference would know why I did not go to any pre-conference events!

Moreover there was little point in my engaging that recent and fervent convert to conspectus, Margaret Henty, in another debate in Perth. I have made several statements of my views which have yet to be effectively answered, and my colleagues in Perth are well aware of this.

Perhaps more disturbing is Eric's attempt to blame me, or my library, for the failure of Curtin University Library catalogue data to appear in the National Bibliographic Database. The fault is not ours. At the outset of ABN I pointed out, at a seminar in Perth, that the cost structure of membership would inhibit the development of the system as a national union catalogue. Subsequent changes in ABN and National Library policies have vindicated my view, which was shared by others, that the NLA had a responsibility to maintain, and fund, the NBD in whatever form it might take.

It must also be noted that Curtin University Library (then WAIT) was the first library to make a major retrospective purchase of data from AMRS; it was, from its commencement, a regular contributor to the National Union Catalogue, and one of the first libraries to provide a complete tape of its holdings to Marc NUCOM. We also responded immediately when the NLA sought data from non-ABN members to add to the NBD. However, it is the

delays in completing the systems modifications to enable the ABN computer to handle our tapes, and to match our records with those in the ABN database, that prevented and still prevents Curtin University records appearing in the online NBD. To facilitate this inclusion we have recently committed considerable staff effort to checking all our serials records to add ISSN data where it is lacking, and we are continuing our efforts to provide records for serials without ISSN's that the ABN system can accept. To cap this sorry tale we have just discovered that the last test tape we sent to ABN was inadvertently mislaid for 5 months! It is a pity the NLA cannot use some more of its, by Eric's figures, considerable resources to solve these basic problems with more expedition.

Lastly, having failed yet again to answer the substance of my criticisms of *conspicuous*, (or to admit my case), Eric asks a range of new questions. Reasonable though they are, and interested to consider them though I could be, in the context of our debate they are surely a smokescreen to obscure the Emperor's increasingly transparent clothes!

*G G Allen*  
University Librarian  
Curtin University of Technology

*(Editor's note: Has nobody else any views on conspicuous?)*

## Living in an information society...

### Dear Editor,

We have read with interest letters in recent issues of *inCite* relating to the difficulties library graduates are experiencing in finding work in Western Australia.

This is not a new situation. Since the establishment of our Employment Services agency in 1986 we have been most concerned at the length of time it takes graduates to obtain full-time permanent work in the profession. Based on the people who register with our service we can confidently state that it may take over 2 years for qualified, hard-working people with amenable personalities to find such work. In the interim they may work within the profession in casual or part-time positions, or as volunteers. Some return to their previous occupations, such as nursing or secretarial work and, of these, some eventually make the decision to remain in that employment and never pursue their library career. Others accept any work available, including washing cars, etc. Of course, there are also those

who are unable to find any work at all.

Over the years we have voiced our concerns in an informal manner to members of the Curtin University School of Information and Library Studies.

Since the beginning of this year our agency has only handled two casual positions. Fortunately for ourselves, our consultancy is very active and we have also been able to offer a couple of people registered with us some casual work on our own projects. We currently have over 150 people, the majority of whom are library graduates, still seeking work. Usually we can place library technicians quite quickly and from time to time have had to specifically advertise for them to register with us.

From our observations, voluntary work may be of benefit to unemployed librarians as they gain experience and have access to the library network. We know of a number of instances where voluntary work has led to some form of employment. We are, however, not advocating the use of unpaid labour and are aware of the dangers of people becoming stuck in the volunteer syndrome.

We believe that the profession generally, certainly in Western Australia, needs to be educated to the use of agents and the benefits that can accrue through their services.

Ours is a female-dominated profession. Women are remaining in the work force and the attrition that used to occur in the profession due to marriage, child raising, etc, is no longer occurring. While it is acknowledged that we are living in an information society and there are strong arguments for librarians to be key players in this society, the reality is that positions are not opening up at the rate our students are graduating.

Through our contact with people who register with us we hear stories of hardship and can see the degree of disillusionment that exists. The present recession has only intensified the problem but, as stated above, it has existed for some time. Some professionals, for example, architects and geologists, are at the forefront of effects on the economy due to the nature of the industries in which they work. Obviously all members of the community feel some effects of the economic cycle, but endeavouring to rationalise the situation presently confronting unemployed librarians by equating them with these other professionals fails to adequately recognise and address the real situation and problem of over-supply.

*Marita D Hoo, AALIA*  
*Shirley R Cowcher, AALIA*  
Information Enterprises Perth

# Vital Link changes

*Page 2*

NSW Branch Professional Development Officer  
John Bartholomaeus, new telephone number: (02) 394 2510.

*Page 2*

QLD Branch Secretary  
Hazel Wood, new address: GPO Box 134, Brisbane, 4001. Same telephone number.

QLD Branch Treasurer  
Jan McNicol, new telephone number: (07) 840 4864 (w).

*Page 3*

TAS Branch Secretary  
New Secretary: Peter Conlon, PO Box 764, Sandy Bay Post Office, Hobart, TAS 7005, telephone (002) 30 7468.  
TAS Branch Treasurer  
New Treasurer: Bridgitte Hutton, PO Box 764, Sandy Bay Post Office, Hobart, TAS 7005, telephone (002) 30 7493.

*Page 8*

Information Management and Consulting Association SIG Treasurer  
Craig Boaden, incorrect fax number, should be: (02) 960 2942.

*Page 21*

Special Libraries Section, QLD Group Secretary  
Ann Hanger, new address/telephone/fax: Central Library, Department of Primary Industries, GPO Box 46 (80 Ann Street), Brisbane, QLD 4001, telephone (07) 239 3104, fax (07) 239 3128.

*Page 21*

Special Libraries Section, WA Branch President  
Penny Tinsley, incorrect address, should be: 190 Hay Street.

## Library Locums

- Permanent
- Temporary
- Short Term Contracts

Tel. (02) 699 1855 Free Phone 008 244 337