

Front Line



Bev Kirby
ALIA President

There is a role for a group that is bigger than the individual, which focuses on the general interests of library and information services, which draws ideas from all levels and from all sectors

THE CONFERENCE *Towards Federation 2001: Linking Australians and their Heritage*, described as 'a national conference on access to Australia's recorded documentary heritage' was organised by the National Library and held in Canberra from 23-26 March.

You will see other reports on the conference and many of you will have an opportunity to follow the passage of the recommendations through the work of the National Library, ACLIS, the State Librarian's Council, the National Film and Sound Archives and to some extent, ALIA.

I am pleased that I was one of the ALIA representatives at the Conference. I heard the Conference described as 'libraries taking significant co-operative action'. There remains much work to be done but the excellent organisation and management of *Towards Federation 2001* will provide a solid basis.

ALIA's participation in a conference of this kind will inevitably lead to the questioning of ALIA's role in relation to groups such as ACLIS. What does ALIA offer that is not available to the library community through ACLIS, CAUL, ASLA, etc? On what basis should and does ALIA seek to participate in decision making in library and information services throughout Australia? We are keen to see these questions answered as we prepare the ALIA Strategic Plan.

In a discussion paper prepared for ALIA General Council on Cross-Sectoral Use of Libraries, Colin Steele (ACT General Councillor 1990-91) and Jane King (Victorian General Councillor 1991-82) identified nationwide issues on information demand. They listed some 28 projects and groups which had cooperative arrangements of various kinds. This list did not include the major groups with which everyone would be familiar. There are many groups which have formed in response to the wide ranging needs of library and information services.

If there are so many groups doing so many things for libraries and library users, is there a place for ALIA?

Responses to the discussion paper on the subject of cross-sectoral use of libraries from ALIA divisions and special interest groups indicate that ALIA is well placed to assume a significant role in fostering debate and providing some input into policy by government or planning by libraries themselves. Comments returned from Divisions show that ALIA is strategically placed to draw on the widest possible feedback from a range of sources. It is also clear that ALIA members see themselves as part of a wider library and information service community while bringing to the debate a view from a particular area of specialisation.

ALIA can seek responses, draw appropriate conclusions and take responsible action on behalf of individuals from every sector. This cross-sectoral base is one of the great strengths of ALIA. All individuals have equal status in the Association whether they be managers, individuals working alone, librarians, library technicians, assistants, information workers or students. Each of us is after all a library user, a worker in a specific field and a worker with the potential to move into other sectors.

Thanks to ALIA we enter a profession knowing that we are able to move around within its boundaries. ALIA provides essential information about potential directions, often providing the gateways as well. ALIA certainly sets the entry level standards and provides the opportunity for individuals to grow and develop within the profession.

While ALIA has different categories of membership its philosophical base makes no distinction on the grounds of qualifications or seniority. We have our gurus and we defer to them from time to time hopefully for their wisdom and experience rather than their power or demeanour.

When someone asks me, '...how important is ALIA in connection with the other groups' my answer is 'more important'. As a consultant and business person I make my contribution to the library world through ALIA because of its general affiliations. I know that ALIA has the infrastructure through which I can share ideas, consult and draw support.

There will be times when ALIA does not agree with other groups. There will be times when ALIA finds itself at odds with individuals. We would be in trouble if that wasn't acceptable.

There is a role for ALIA. There is a role for a group that is bigger than the individual, which focuses on the general interests of library and information services, which draws ideas from all levels and from all sectors and which complements a series of interest groups that without ALIA could grow further apart. ALIA is the one group that has the potential to strengthen the library ethos through its membership. Without ALIA there would be little unity in the library and information services profession.

ALIA has played a significant role in the development of library and information services in Australia. As we approach the year 2001 and we talk about cooperation ALIA will continue to make a vital contribution. □