

Infobridges: linking Australia and Asia

Alex Byrne reports on the RAISS Conference, Darwin 1993

The major theme for the 1993 Conference of the Reference and Information Service Section of the Australian Library and Information Association, *Infobridges: Linking Australia and Asia*, was apt, reflecting the location of the Conference in Darwin, Australia's gateway with Asia. Librarians in the 'Top End', in

focus on quality in all aspects of business and government including tertiary education: a challenge to which libraries must respond.

The three keynote speakers addressed these issues in a most stimulating and provocative fashion. Mr Mick Dodson, Aboriginal Social Justice Commissioner at the Human Rights

a range of papers, workshops and panel sessions involving more than thirty speakers. They dealt with many aspects of reference and information service in libraries and information centres of many types. Their number and scope demonstrated the growing maturity of the Reference and Information Service Section.

That strength was also demonstrated through the attendance at the Conference which attracted a total of 179 delegates from every Australian state and territory, Indonesia, Singapore, Malaysia, Thailand, United States, Great Britain, Denmark, New Zealand and the Philippines. We had the first trade exhibition at a reference conference, Tradelink, and strong support from sponsors.

At the conclusion of the Conference, the Conference Committee presented the incoming Conference Committee, from South Australia, with a Message Stick to symbolise the nature of our avocation. It was designed and crafted by Theodore Tipiloura of the Tiwi people whose home is the Tiwi (Bathurst and Melville) Islands to the north of Darwin. It illustrates Theodore's own perceptions of our organisation, our aims and objectives. It has an outer ring of dots representing the Aboriginal tribes who have come together for a meeting. The dashes inside the lines of dots represent the individuals themselves. The white central lines represent the speaker—in this case a Catholic Bishop who addressed the meeting. Among other things he spoke to the people about the importance of their links with the land, the importance of keeping their oral traditions alive and of sharing them with their children and the wider non-Aboriginal community too. The lines on either side of the speaker, we understand, represent the dialogue between him and the listeners.

The 1993 Conference Committee feel that the Message Stick is a most appropriate symbol for RAISS. It was presented to the 1995 Conference Committee to be passed on to succeeding committees as a perpetual symbol of the Section's ethos.

Delegates to the Darwin Conference will receive a complimentary copy of the proceedings which will be printed and distributed within a few weeks. Copies can also be purchased; availability and price will be advertised in *inCite*. ■



Alex Byrne, Conference Convenor (centre) with the Hon. Mr Shane Stone, Minister for Asian Relations, and Ann Wilson, the Conference Social Coordinator

common with other residents, are very conscious of our proximity to Asia and Indonesia in particular.

The subthemes reflected both the high proportion of Aboriginal peoples in the Northern Territory and the multicultural population of Darwin which makes us very sensitive to cultural issues. The Conference Committee felt that these issues were of national and international importance to reference and information services.

Little did we know two years ago that these themes would become so topical by the time of the Conference. The Mabo decision of the High Court of Australia has rekindled consideration of the status and rights of Australia's indigenous people. Renewed recognition of Australia's geographical location has given new impetus to the expansion of trade, diplomatic, defence and cultural links with our regional neighbours. Globalisation of the economy coupled with belated emergence from recession has called for a

and Equal Opportunity Commission, spoke on *Cultural Issues, Indigenous Peoples and Libraries*. He challenged delegates to adopt a broad and unbiased understanding of differing perspective's so as to 'build sturdy bridges which will support, strengthen and link all peoples'. Ms Jenny Cram, National President of the Australian Library and Information Association, spoke on performance management advocating concern with people and quality of life with an aspiration to a profound sense of job satisfaction, commitment to change and faith in people. The author of *The Yellow Lady*, Ms Alison Broinowski, related change to a transformation of Australia and in Australia's perception of a relationship with Asia. In her view, libraries have a central role in Australia's transformation into 'a different sort of country, a country where difference itself is valued'.

These stimulating keynote papers were expanded and complemented by