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With the Federal election, the politicians have deserted Canberra and the various operations of the Federal Government have come to a grinding halt. Pending legislation and the Committees of Inquiry have lost their power until they are re-empowered by the incoming government. After the flurry of inquiries and reports to respond to over the past several years, a hiatus has developed, with the winter of activity standing ominously in the wings.

It was interesting to watch throughout this election, the prominence which the Labor Party has attached to information and the potential value of information services in an internationally competitive Australian economy. The television advertising for the Labor Party had at least two versions of Barry Jones advocating this very viewpoint. It is not surprising that Barry Jones should be Labor's representative advocating this stance, since he was the Chairman of the House of Representatives Standing Committee for Long Term Strategies reporting on Australia as an Information Society.

However what is fascinating, is that in the Federal Labor Government's response to the recommendations of the Jones Report, *Australia as an Information Society: Grasping New Paradigms*, it accepts that 'As Australia makes the transition to a global economy in real time, information policy issues will be increasingly important', and yet the report is seen as a mechanism for awareness-raising, and not as a basis for policy. That is not to say that at some stage in the future, policy will not be formulated. But the initiative for the development of a national information policy must come from the community and the information industry, not government.

For the library sector, the inquiry and the report has been useful in promoting a better knowledge and understanding amongst policy makers and others of the value of information, of information services and of information providers, and their potential to contribute to the growth and development of Australia. The Government response notes that the library sector will be seeking to further promote this knowledge, understanding and awareness of issues related to not having an information policy for Australia. This initiative is still under consideration by the Association in consultation with ACLIS, the National Library of Australia and CIRCIT.

Overseas there is a similar growth in concern about the lack of a national information policy within the library communities of Western countries. In New Zealand last year, the National Library of New Zealand in association with Vic-

toria University's Institute of Policy Studies produced a booklet on *Managing data, knowledge and know how: Information Policy issues for the 1990's*. In Canada, the Canadian Library Association and ASTED organised a National Summit on Information Policy in December 1992. The Canadian Summit saw the opening of dialogue on information policy as the starting point in the building of consensus amongst the various stakeholders in Canada's information industry.

In the United States, the Special Libraries Association convened a national meeting of key information policy personnel to pursue the development of a *National Information Policies: Strategies for the Future* in the USA. This initiative will be continued through three meetings. The SLA identified two basic principles in these early discussions: that information is essential to the growth of a democratic society, and that access is guaranteed to all, except where law and human rights prohibit its further distribution.

Post the Federal election in Australia, the library community will need to review its commitment to facilitating the growing up of the concept of an information policy for Australia. For irrespective of the outcome of the election, Australia will need a coordinated approach to the development of a national information policy, and the library sector has not only a critical role to play in its development, but also an interest which is critical to the future of Australian libraries as key players in Australia as an information society. ■

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