

Meeting the needs of a changing profession

In this issue we continue our series of information pieces about our changing organisation. In the following interview Derek Whitehead, president of ACLIS, provides his vision of the library organisation of the future.

inCite: What is the ALIA/ACLIS leadership committee?

Derek Whitehead: The leadership committee was established upon the signing (in September) of a memorandum of understanding between Australia's two main library organisations, ALIA and ACLIS. It was given that curious (and unprecedented, as far as I know) name in the hope that it would provide leadership to the library/information sector. You will be the proper judges of whether it has, at the end of 1998.

inCite: What is this committee's major function?

DW: The major function is to lead the creation of a new organisation. As John Shipp pointed out in his interview (*inCite*, January 1998), this involves setting a general direction, and providing a vision. The vision is the tricky part, and we are interested in your response to the draft vision distributed to all ALIA and ACLIS members in February.

inCite: What progress has the Leadership Committee made in achieving its goals?

DW: Quite a lot. This interview took place in January, and there will have been more progress since then. Since being set up in September we have drafted a proposed new organisational model, met in two joint meetings with the councils of ALIA and ACLIS, and organised for joint-service delivery to take place from 1 January 1998 next. We have set a goal for the new organisation to operate from 1 January 1999.

In the February issue of *inCite*, you will have received an outline of what the new organisation might look like. This draft itself is a big step forward, and your responses and comments will be the next step forward. We need them.

The Leadership Committee is meeting at the end of January, and then again a month or so later. The councils of ALIA and of ACLIS are meeting during March. There will be opportunities, electronic and physical, for discussion and dialogue during February and March, and we hope you will participate.

inCite: What will be the benefits to members belonging to the new organisation?

DW: The short answer is a question: 'What would you like the benefits to be?'. I hope

that the functions and activities of the new association will be determined by the members — the Leadership Committee believes strongly that the needs of its members should be the basis for its service priorities. We would be delighted to hear from you on what you think the main benefits provided by the organisation should be. The creation of a new organisation provides an opportunity to review what we have been doing, and improve on it.

We also hope that the new organisation will benefit a wide range of members — individuals who work in libraries, libraries and other information organisations as institutions, and people who support libraries and a range of common goals. It is going to be quite a challenge to bring all of these people together, and we are finding that there are often quite different cultures involved in ALIA and ACLIS and the other library-focussed organisations. Additionally, cultures and attitudes can differ from state to state.

inCite: Why do we want a new organisation?

DW: We want a new organisation as one of the ways to help solve some problems — there are problems, and the current situation is not perfect. The main problems that need solving are:

- The library sector is highly-fragmented in its representation; it is inefficient to divide our resources in this way.
- Our organisations' representation, structures and procedures are often cumbersome and ineffective.
- We need a single external face in promoting ourselves to governments, and to people in general.
- The environment we operate in is getting more complex and changing faster, and we need to have an organisation which can respond effectively.

This is not to say that either organisation has been ineffective. Both ALIA and ACLIS have substantial achievements to their credit, and we have a long history of good work on behalf of the library and information sector. In particular, a great deal of time is put in by hundreds of members working through the sections and groups of ALIA, and the ACLIS subcommittees. But we can do better, especially in relation to co-ordinating our work.

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inCite: What is the major goal/mission of the new organisation?

DW: The new organisation will represent the library and information sector, individuals, institutions, and supporters. That means providing a range of support services (advice, accreditation, research, education, promotion), providing a mechanism for consultation, discussion and decision-making, and also providing a strong and active voice for the things which are important to us.

The things which are important to us are not just our everyday affairs and interests. Libraries stand for certain principles — equitable access to information, the free flow of ideas, the working of a collaborative system.

inCite: How will this new organisation work?

DW: This will be determined in consultation with members. You have now seen the February *inCite* — what do you think?

The Leadership Committee has thought about these things, and it strongly supports a structure which is both representative, and enables the organisation to act quickly. There are some major issues to sort through, and we welcome suggestions.

One such issue is the role of the states. Is the balance of functions in the existing ALIA and ACLIS the right balance? Should there be more resources and more autonomy in the states? In his interview, John Shipp asked 'How do we maintain the level of services currently provided by ALIA National Office while increasing resources available at the local level?'. The obvious answer is that we cannot. If we put more resources into the states, these must come from somewhere — either from increased fees, or via lesser national role. So we need to ask ourselves just what it is we want the states to do that they are not doing now. Maybe there is not much more we want done at the state level — or maybe there is a lot.

inCite: What will it cost to belong?

DW: We don't know the answer to that yet, although we do know that this is one of the main concerns of members. It partly depends on what services you want provided. The general level and incidence of fees is a major issue. You will get what you pay for, and there is probably very little scope for providing the current range of services at reduced price. We will be seeking advice on fee

structures, and your comments would provide welcome input.

inCite: How will the new organisation effectively represent both individual and institutional members?

DW: This is a matter of real concern to ACLIS members, some of whom fear that institutional interests will be swamped by the voting power of individuals. In my view, this is extremely unlikely, and I agree with John Shipp that it is a red herring. Institutions already exercise considerable influence within ALIA, as well as within ACLIS.

If institutions wish to be represented separately in some way, the best way within the structure proposed in the February issue of *inCite* would be to form a division or section, just as other interest groups will do.

The most important thing is that we are forming a new organisation, and this will give us an opportunity to think in different ways too. I know that some ACLIS members are apprehensive about the changes now taking place, and may look on them as a take-over by ALIA. This is not the case. The Leadership Committee has agreed to look afresh at an administrative structure for the new organisation, and at a name — we are not making the assumption that everything will stay the same as it is now.

inCite: What opportunities will there be for members to influence the creation of the new organisation?

DW: I have mentioned some ways of influencing things in answers to other questions. The Leadership Committee will keep up a steady flow of information, through *inCite* and *ACLIS News*, and through ALIANet. Every issue of *inCite* will include comprehensive coverage of the formation organisation. New information will be added to ALIANet regularly — as it happens. Watch <http://www.alia.org.au>.

The contributions of members are essential (and we are also very interested in what non-members think), because the new organisation will only be built with the active support of the library sector and its friends and supporters. Participate in whatever way you want, but make sure you take part!

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