

Australian Library Week 1998

A message from Senator Richard Alston, deputy leader of the senate and federal minister for communications, the information economy and the arts

Australia's library community is responding to the opportunities of the 'information age' with vitality and dynamism.

The willingness of libraries to share resources and their commitment to placing Australian material online is to be applauded. The benefits will be enjoyed by many Australians.

As libraries continue to share resources and contribute to the information economy, Australians are increasingly turning to them as a source of information via the Internet, as well as a source of literature.

This year's Australian Library Week theme — *pathways to knowledge* — is a notion this Government is committed to, particularly in terms of developing and enhancing online activity.

The Federal Government has been involved in major initiatives that allow Australians — young, old and in-between — to tap into, and take full advantage of the benefits of advanced information technologies.

Australia's Cultural Network, an Internet gateway to Australia's cultural organisations, resources, activities and events, launched earlier this month, is a great example.

An important aspect of Australia's Cultural Network is encouraging projects that showcase the use of online technologies in Australia's cultural community — such as the Australian Libraries Gateway and the Australian Museums On Line (AMOL).

On behalf of the Australian library community, the National Library of Australia is developing the Australian Libraries Gateway to provide

access to a wide range of tools and information about Australian libraries.

With more than 2000 libraries in the database, this web-based service is a directory of information about every library in Australia. Its goal is to be a 'one-stop-shop' for Australian libraries — a vital tool for Australian and international users.

The National Library of Australia also recently announced the completion of the tendering process for the Networked Services Project, which incorporates the AMICUS library software package.

This co-operative computer network gives the library community a new model for accomplishing national tasks, providing immediate access to the knowledge stored in libraries well into the twenty-first century.

When fully implemented, the networked service will offer the ability to support up to 1000 concurrent users and to handle up to fifteen million authority and bibliographic records.

The Government also continues to encourage the development of telecommunications infrastructure in remote Australia through Networking the Nation — its \$250 million Regional Telecommunications Infrastructure Fund (RTIF). This program has already assisted to increase points of presence in community centres and libraries throughout Australia, giving people in remote areas the chance to experience the same access to information enjoyed by those in urban areas.

Libraries have an important role in helping Australians everywhere navigate and utilise the information highway and to discover the wonderful collections held throughout the country.

I trust the spirit of sharing and goodwill within the library community will continue to grow. Australian Library Week provides an important opportunity for each of us to appreciate the co-operative progress made and reminds us of the wealth of information available to all Australians." ■

Q & A with Bill Gates

The Weekend Australian, 14 March 1998

ALIA's Western Australia Australian Library Week Committee posed the following question to Bill Gates in *The Weekend Australian*:

The theme for Australian Library Week in May this year is *Pathways to knowledge*. As information professionals we are engaged in creating new pathways to knowledge through the use of digital technologies and the world wide web. We know that you have a major interest in and are a great supporter of libraries in the US. What is your vision of their future in the digital world?

Mr Gates' answer was most encouraging:

"You're right. I am involved with libraries in the US. My goal in doing so is to ensure that people of all communities have access to personal computers and the Internet. I see it as a great equaliser and an opportunity for people to reach out and have the world at their fingertips, to seek out and share information and to learn throughout their lives. I call that a collected learning environment..."