ALIA's lobbying strategy

The ALIA Board of Directors has endorsed the Association's federal government initiatives advocacy statement *Connecting Australians* as the basis for its lobbying and advocacy activities for the 2001 Federal election and 2002 Federal Budget.

Connecting Australians

Australia's library and information services sector is a dynamic participant in the information industry. The sector strives for equitable access to information for the Australian community within the context of their work, leisure, educational and cultural pursuits, and to ensure that Australians have the skills to access and utilise this information.

The Australian people look to the federal government to provide leadership in upholding their democratic right to equitable access to information and establishing the key role of information in our society and for our economy. The Australian Library and Information Association believes that this can be achieved through federal government policy directions that:

- deliver programs to enable:
  - citizens to fully participate in the democratic process to create an economic and social environment where Australians can enjoy the best quality of life and standard of living;
  - communities, individuals and business to access information unconstrained by costs, restrictions, or communications infrastructure;
  - individuals to access, evaluate and use information efficiently and effectively, that is, to be information literate;
- gain commitment from state, territory and local governments to support Federal and industry initiatives;
- engender a knowledge culture within Australian society.

An investment by the federal government in the library and information services sector is an investment in Australia's social, cultural, economic and knowledge future.

Connecting Australians program initiatives

Connecting Australians comprises two programs proposed by the Association for adoption by the Federal government and inclusion in the 2002 federal budget: *Bridging the information divide in Australia's communities*; and *Investing in information for a better society*.

Bridging the information divide in Australia's communities

An issue close to many Australians is the so-called 'digital divide'. This has been seen as particularly relevant to rural Australians. However, evidence suggests that many Australians who live in urban areas are also struggling to access quality, up-to-date information, often as a result of inadequate funding of public institutions such as libraries to provide facilities and training. Most communities have access to a public library, and these libraries have high levels of use by those sectors of the community who would generally not have the financial resources or skills to access electronic information resources. Australia's public library network is ideally placed to help to bridge the information divide, both in rural and urban areas.

The *Bridging the information divide in Australia's communities* program would offer specific grant funding to establish the public library as the focal community access point for publicly available electronic information and government interactive electronic resources. Funding of $21 million over three years would include $18 million for the public libraries internet workstation technological component and $3 million for a national information skills public education and training program centred in Australia's public libraries and administered by the Association. State and local governments would take responsibility for physical space, telecommunications costs and staffing support.

An important corollary to this program would be government initiatives for improving the telecommunications infrastructure including equitable pricing of services, and reliable connections with adequate bandwidth.

A further initiative would be the provision of recurrent funding to include in national statistical collection on internet use the percentage and number of internet access points in Australian public libraries, the number of libraries connected, their telecommunications and connectivity capabilities, levels of use and use purpose, a breakdown of funding sources, the extent and nature of training, level of use of blocking technologies, and the level of use of linguistic and disabilities access enhancements. The availability of current data could be improved by funding support for a six monthly electronic survey conducted by the National Office of the Information Economy.

Investing in information for a better society

An investment in information is an investment in knowledge, learning, research and business for Australia's future growth. It is timely to move beyond technology and connectivity to realising the value of information to our communities, business, and individuals.

The *Investing in information* program has three components.

1. *Information skills training, including responsible use of the internet*

More and more Australians are becoming computer literate. Many are not sufficiently ▶

The Australian people look to the federal government to provide leadership in upholding their democratic right to equitable access to information and establishing the key role of information in our society

information literate, and with the creation of information and the use of electronic information resources increasing, the need for information skills training has never been more critical. Information literacy skills give individuals the capability to recognise a need for information and access, evaluate and use that information efficiently and effectively. Training in responsible use of the internet is a socially responsible approach to enabling users to enjoy positive internet experiences. *Investing in information* would provide $500 000 over two years, to be administered by the Association, to design and develop both online interactive and face-to-face user training programs and training for library and information professionals to deliver these programs within their educational, research, government and business communities. Better information creation and use will ensure that Australia is not only competitive but takes a leading role in the global information and knowledge economies.

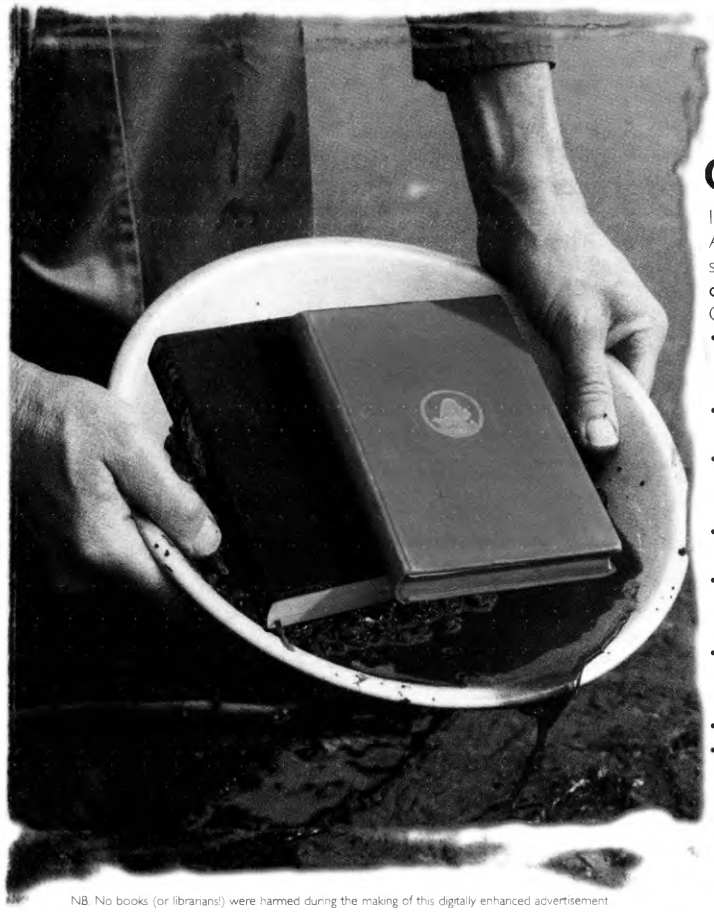
2. *Copyright in the digital environment*

Library and information professionals act as responsible intermediaries balancing the legitimate needs of users of copyright works with the legitimate rights of copyright holders. Most copying of material in libraries is for educational, research or private study purposes. Copyright protection should encourage, not inhibit, use and creativity. Australian copyright law should not give rights holders the power to use technological or contractual measures to override the exceptions and limitations to copyright and distort the balance set in international and domestic copyright legislation. Copyright legislation should render invalid any terms of a licence that restrict or override exceptions or limitations embodied in the law. *Investing in information* upholds the principles that nothing in a licence or contract should be able to extinguish fair dealing uses or limit the rights of any libraries under the *Copyright Act*. It aims for a balance between the rights of copyright owners to protect their interests through technical means and rights of users to circumvent such measures for legitimate, non-infringing purposes. It upholds the exceptions within the legislation and the rights of all libraries to these exceptions regardless of the status of their parent body.

3. *Removing the tax on books and scholarly journals*

Australia had a proud history of leading the world in recognising the value of reading, learning and the sharing of knowledge by not taxing books and scholarly journals. The imposition of the GST increases the financial burden on the community of reading and learning. Removing the tax on books will cost $100 million, and less for journals. By removing the tax on books and journals the next Australian government is *Investing in information* and showing its commitment to engendering a knowledge culture in Australia. ■

Better information creation and use will ensure that Australia is not only competitive but takes a leading role in the global information and knowledge economies...



NB. No books (or librarians!) were harmed during the making of this digitally enhanced advertisement

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