

A first for Australia and a win for all Australians

In an era of the internet and ever-expanding electronic services, direct and immediate access to online information is fundamental to a well-informed, educated, economically competitive and democratic society. Libraries must compete, not only for funds but also for significance, and anything that can assist with savings and bringing authoritative resources to their customers is both extremely important and highly appealing.

On 9 May 2007 in the nation's capital not only was the town abuzz with the budget news, but all eyes were turned towards the National Library where another historic event was occurring. Thirty-six librarians from various library sectors across Australia met for a national forum to launch ERA – Electronic Resources Australia.

ERA will facilitate free end user access to key online general reference, Australian news and business, and health information resources and stands to significantly enhance the professional status of Australian libraries. It enables libraries to be placed at the forefront of lifelong learning, inspiring creativity and creating possibilities for a vibrant and creative Australia.

Libraries will be able to select and subscribe to electronic resources from a product panel and provide free access to their clients, regardless of their locations. Millions of Australians will have improved opportunities to access quality information through their library. The collaborative purchasing power of ERA will enable more Australian libraries to afford subscriptions to these resources. By working together, ERA offers all Australian librarians an opportunity to benefit from their collective experiences in licensing and delivery of electronic services.

Over the past four years significant work has been undertaken to establish ERA, however more work remains to be done. An interim governance committee has been established to oversee and continue the work by ensuring more products are added to the panel enabling greater choice and

savings for libraries. More information can be obtained from <http://era.nla.gov.au/governance/>.

How do I get this deal?

By visiting the ERA website <http://era.nla.gov.au/> libraries will choose the product/s that they want and notify the ERA secretariat of their choice. Once all the libraries have responded (by 31 July) the vendors will be notified of the libraries interested. The vendors will then contact the libraries directly to organise payment, training and setup.

By vendor request, ERA subscription pricing is password-protected and available to libraries only. Libraries should send an e-mail request to era@nla.gov.au. A password will then be sent which will allow access to the commercial-in-confidence files.

But I am already in a consortium?

The pricing that has been negotiated for each sector enables individual libraries or existing consortia to utilise ERA for some or all of their product mix. It is only with the co-operation of the existing consortia that the benefits of ERA can be fully realised. No consortia will be disadvantaged by the deals that have been negotiated with vendors, in fact further savings of 5–10 per cent should be achieved.

What products are available?

At present the following products have been selected and are available for libraries to purchase; further products will be added.

Australian News & Business Information

- ABI/INFORM® Global / ProQuest CSA
- Asian Business and Reference™/ ProQuest CSA
- Australia & New Zealand Newsstand/ ProQuest CSA

General Reference

- Australia/New Zealand Reference Centre™ / EBSCO Publishing
- Oxford Reference Online Premium / Oxford University Press
- WorldBook Online Reference Centre/ Forward Learning Pty Ltd

Health Information

- Health & Wellness Resource Centre/ Thomson Gale Australia
- Health Reference Centre Academic/ Thomson Gale Australia
- Consumer Health Complete™/ EBSCO Publishing

Benefits of ERA

ERA offers significant potential benefits for Australians and their libraries. These are:

- Australians across all rural, regional and urban areas, all social groups and diverse community organisations will have access to quality online resources through all types of libraries.
- Australians will benefit through access to information that supports business, vocational, government, educational and community activities.
- The licence is a very tangible step towards overcoming the isolation experienced daily by those living in rural and remote regions of Australia, by facilitating their access to reliable and readily available information sources.
- Significant business opportunities and economies of scale can be offered to publishers and suppliers of Australian online resources through access to national markets.
- The bargaining position of libraries is strengthened by negotiating as a consortium, offering vendors economies of scale and single-point purchasing. Subscriptions to their online resources will become more affordable for libraries, and this benefit will flow on to their users in improved services.
- The broader Australian community will become more aware of the benefits of electronic resources and so make more effective and profitable use of them.
- Libraries will acquire a higher profile at all levels of government.

The ERA initiative opens the way to producing a framework for the creation of licences across different library sectors that satisfy the needs of libraries, consumers and vendors. It will facilitate the creation of mutually effective agreements between all interested parties with regard to costs, access principles, authentication and performance measurements. However, it is only with the co-operation of us all that the full benefits of ERA will be fully realised. By working together we can achieve greater outcomes for our customers; you too can be a part of history when you put your support behind this project.

Further information can be obtained from <http://era.nla.gov.au> or contact era@nla.gov.au.

