

## Concern about Library Board of WA

Dear colleagues

We have significant concerns about the Association's apparent acceptance of the whims of 'modern management' in its support to discard the ALIA position on the Library Board of Western Australia. Parts of the Act are under review, one component being Board membership.

We continue to be annoyed at the way in which our profession keeps losing ground in professional representation. Our concern about the abolition of this ALIA appointment is justified in terms of the very goals that have been set for the modified Board. It is self-evidently apparent that a library professional, nominated by ALIA, would come with the absolutely appropriate, knowledge and experience to undertake these Board duties.

The language of 'contemporary practice' is used in the Library Board Act Review consultation document, particularly so in the proposed changes to the Board's composition. We have been accused of being 'precious' and 'old fashioned' in insisting that the ALIA appointment remain. But we will not resile from this position, because of the following reasons:

- The business of the State Library of Western Australia is libraries and the peak body representing the library profession is ALIA. As with other peak professional organisations, ALIA sees that part of its role is to have input into key decision making bodies that influence the working environment of members and the value the profession provides to clients. Clearly the Board is one such body.
- It could very easily happen that there is no member of the newly constructed Board with a library background. Although having a general interest in libraries and their services will presumably be expected of Board members, this in no way compensates for the depth of knowledge and understanding that is gained by many years working as a library professional. The inclusion

of an ALIA nominee provides an assurance that there will be at least one appropriately skilled and experienced member of the Board.

- A Board member from the library profession would be a particularly informed voice within Board discussions, providing advice to members on the likely impact of decisions made regarding operational matters.
- An ALIA nominee on the Board could be a powerful advocate in gaining support from the library and information profession for initiatives taken by the Board.
- The ALIA nominee should bring to the Board considerable experience in library operations and management. This might not necessarily be from a public library perspective and this would not be such a bad thing. Any library experience should be invaluable in Board discussions, irrespective of the sector of the profession from which it is drawn.

The last straw for us was in a carefully worded email from an ALIA Board Director which included the following statement: 'We assume that the new Board will have good access amongst its members to library skills and knowledge, and that Board members will be selected on merit, not as of right'. What a dangerous assumption to make. We would assume no such thing. Board appointments, whilst approved by the Governor of Western Australia are Ministerial. We rest our case.

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I note with interest the discussion in WA regarding the review of the Library Board Act, in particular the comments regarding ALIA representation on the Board.

I would like to point out the following:

The Act was last updated in the early 1950s and is now outdated in terms of modern management practices. The world is a rapidly changing one and the Act should not hamstring the organisation

from achieving outcomes and remaining relevant into the future. It needs to be flexible to meet the changing demands.

The new Act should be in line with normal government practices for boards, which the current Library Board Act is not.

According to the AICD (Australian Institute of Company Directors) 'an Australian board must have the appropriate mix of skills and competencies that are required to maximise the company's performance'.

To ensure good governance the people with the right mix of skills should be placed on the Library Board. As a result this does not preclude a librarian being placed on the Board but their participation should be based on their skills and contribution rather than their association affiliation.

The proposed changes to the Act actually potentially encourage current library managers to be considered for Board contention as the local government representative.

ALIA can continue to influence and support the State Library without having to have a seat on the board and can probably do more through the relationship between ALIA ED and State Library CEO.

However, the onus therefore still remains on the profession to ensure that librarians have the relevant skills to be considered for boards and therefore be able to contribute in an appropriate manner, rather than just because a person is a member of ALIA.

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