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Feedback to your Board of Directors

Board members welcome your comments and feedback. Please feel free to contact a Board member at any time.

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This issue of Frontline, dated Wattle Day (September 1) comes to you from Alice Springs, where the ALIA Biennial Conference is meeting.

The ALIA Biennial Conference has not been held in the Northern Territory since Darwin in 1993, and never before in Alice Springs.

The National Advisory Congress (NAC), on the other hand, is held every year everywhere. This year, as well as in Canberra, Melbourne, Sydney, Brisbane, Hobart, Perth, Adelaide and Darwin, it was held in Mackay, Bendigo, Wallsend (in the Hunter Valley), the Gold Coast, and, on Wattle Day, a wrap-up meeting will be held in Alice Springs. We have also held teleconferences for library technicians and people unable to get to a meeting. Reports were that attendances were up on last year, and that there was a high level of interest in the main themes.

We had two main themes at the NAC around the country – a report back on the Education and Workforce Summit held on March 30 2008, and a discussion of the professional development scheme run by ALIA.

I dealt with the Summit outcomes in July's Frontline (*Like a parade of elephants*). But the issues dealt with by the Summit – the library workforce, library skills, library and information education – are perennial matters of interest, and in that sense they will always feature prominently in any consultation amongst ALIA members.

In fact, they feature prominently in this issue of *inCite*, which has the theme of library studies. One of the developments from the Summit has been the first meeting via teleconference of librarianship educators in recent times, convened by Damian Lodge, a member of the ALIA Board, senior lecturer at Charles Sturt University and associate director of the Centre for Information Studies. This issue includes articles on industry placement, library technology since web 2.0, information studies at Curtin and QUT, and an explanation of the ALIA course recognition process.

The other half of the NAC meetings dealt with the ALIA professional development (PD) scheme. There has apparently been a wide range of viewpoints at the NAC on the PD scheme. It is described at <http://www.alia.org.au/education/pd/> There are clear and straightforward instructions on how and why to join, yet relatively few members have become involved – around a tenth of ALIA members. Why, and what we should do about it, was the other main subject matter of the NAC this year.

My NAC group (in Bendigo) had an active and engaged discussion on the matter, although no-one was currently involved in PD. There were several issues canvassed.

1. How does professionally-oriented PD connect up with workplace development programs? Lots of employers provide training and development opportunities, often arising out of their approach to performance planning.
2. Supportive employers are very important – essential – to the success of PD, but how do we achieve this? Employers are likely to be hard-headed about how their staff spend their time – in other words, they want to see a workplace benefit. How do we convey the value of professional development to them?
3. How do popular, broadly used programs which periodically arise and challenge us relate to PD? At my institution, pretty much all of the staff began the 23 Things program (dealing with web 2.0 skills) and about 80% completed it. Should there be PD credits for this?
4. The relationship between PD points and more formal academic credits was raised by us in Bendigo. Can I get a degree for this? Can I get credits, or recognition of prior learning? How do the two forms of education intersect, if they do? Some people would rather put their efforts into obtaining more formal academic credentials, and the reasons for this are clear.
5. Should we link PD with professional recognition? It does seem curious that once you have qualified to be a library professional, it is valid forever, no matter how much changes in the world around us.

The current PD scheme is flexible enough to accommodate many of the points made by us at the Bendigo NAC, and the issues that I have raised in this column. But the application of flexibility takes time.

The final NAC session is on September 1, just before the Biennial Conference. Anyone can attend the session, which is in the afternoon.

And of course attending the last NAC session gives you an unparalleled opportunity to celebrate Wattle Day in the heart of Australia. Wattle Day is canvassed by some people as our future national day. The green and gold of wattle is ubiquitous national symbol, used in lots of ways from sporting events to the design of the Australian honours insignia.

See you there.