Roxanne Missingham
ALIA President

**Feedback to *your*
Board of Directors**

Board members welcome your
comments and feedback. Please
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at any time.

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Australians are supported for their development of literacy/reading, education, business, community and digital access through a network of approximately 1,522 national, state and public library service points. Australians use these libraries heavily – making over 108 million visits in 2005-06. In addition Australians benefit for services provided by approximately 9000 school libraries, 42 university libraries, technical and further education, health, law and other special libraries.

As a nation we lack basic literacy skills. In January, the Australian Bureau of Statistics released its report, *Adult literacy and life skills* finding that slightly less than half of the Australian population, approximately 7 million, failed to achieve the minimum required level or higher in prose and document literacy.

To be able to harness digital technologies and equip our nation to compete within the global community, libraries need to be recognised as providing vital information, information skills and collections. Individual libraries are selectively digitising the nation's documentary heritage, working to deliver support for online government services online (Environmetrics 2004 NSW Public Libraries and eGovernment **http://www.sl.nsw.gov.au/pln/projects/egov_report.pdf**) while providing information skills.

A new national broadband network will open the door to information for many Australians, as will computers in schools. To counter the variable quality of information on the Internet, Australian libraries, including public and school libraries, have selected quality electronic resources. If libraries invest in these online resources it will benefit the wider community. In addition, support for training would increase computer and information literacy and enable individuals to use the Internet for education, business, health or community information.

We need:

- Australian culture online with a nationally funded digital program
- Literacy skills with partnerships which recognise and fund roles for schools, libraries and community organisations rather than fragmented, piecemeal solutions
- National online quality resources to support education, business and communities
- Recognition and support for the delivery of government services through public libraries, rather than cost shifting.

We have much to achieve and many infrastructure issues to address to ensure that we as a nation have the skills and resources to operate in the digital economy. National debate should go beyond learning at school to engage with business, community and libraries, recognizing that improvements can only be made if the wider community is involved.

Much of Australia's recorded history is held in its libraries – particularly national, state and public libraries. While developments in recent years have led to digitisation, particularly pictures and newspapers and now a national newspaper digitisation program, much of our creative heritage is locked up and inaccessible to the nation's citizens simply because of geographic location.

Our digital programs are world class – the National Library of Australia's Pandora program, creating a national archive of digital publishing has led to the development of standards, technologies and preservation.

Without a national framework and funding, our creative achievements and histories are fragments strewn through physical collections; roadkill on the information superhighway.

To move forward we need national thinking and programs, such as those suggested by the Senate Environment, Communications, Information Technology and the Arts Committee report *Libraries in the online environment.*

'Innovative industry depends on access to our creative resources. A national program to provide a future for activities such as PictureAustralia, Music Australia and digitisation programs is needed.'

So reads our submission to the Australia 2020 summit **http://www.alia.org.au/advocacy/submissions/**

The imminent release of the first report of the Australian School Libraries Research Project, *Education in the far north: School libraries in the Northern Territory, Preliminary Findings*, provides evidence of the state of information provision and access in NT schools.

The study outcomes include:

- School libraries in remote schools in the NT are not adequately resourced. Most remote schools are better resourced from commonwealth funding and charitable foundations.

- Remote schools commonly house their literacy and professional development resources in classrooms, whilst urban schools have more comprehensive collections located in their libraries. Learning technologies are readily accessible in urban schools. Remote schools have been held back due to bandwidth issues. Only twenty-three teacher librarians work in NT school libraries. Urban primary and some remote schools have a teacher or administrative officer managing their school library, usually on a part-time basis.

Traditionally a President's last *Frontline* article would thank members of the Board, ALIA National office staff and all members, which I do. I think, however, that the national state of information access for Australians deserves much more recognition and our nation is in a parlous state–of which we all should be aware.

Thanks for a wonderful year.

Roxanne