



A conference to remember

From the desk of the Library Provocateur

Welcome to Broome, in the former state of Western Australia. It's an unusually mild autumn day in the year 2030 and, as predicted way back at the start of the century, Broome's booming population growth has made it the undisputed 'regional capital' of recently un-federated Australia. Some 500 000 people now call the city home, as does Sun Corp (Australia's largest generator of solar electricity), the prestigious West Coast University (WCU), and Australia's newest NRL franchise – the triple premiership winning Pearlers.

After nearly a decade of lobbying by the local Chamber of Commerce and an offer of generous financial sponsorship from Sun Corp, the Certified Library and Information Professionals of Australasia are finally holding their annual conference in Broome. Even in what is still very much a tourist Mecca, hotels are at peak capacity and the city is fairly awash with garrulous information practitioners.

Morning one of the conference and nearly twenty thousand voluble CLIPA members converge on Dampier Stadium, home of the mighty Pearlers, for the welcome address. Their popular President mounts the stage on the halfway line, adjusts his Apple ePod (ear pod) and motions for quiet. After two consecutive terms and nearly four years as paid full time president, this is his last conference before returning to professional practice.

One by one he calls the Board on stage and briefly introduces each of four elected directors and two new appointees – a politically well connected ex-Senator and successful 'social media' proprietor, and the current deputy chairman of the 'Future Fund 2'. Collectively they represent nearly 30 years of Board experience and some impressive government and corporate connections. The organisation has never been so well represented or respected in the corridors of power.

As the CLIPA Board members take their seats on stage, another hush descends over the stadium. The guest of honour is introduced and strides purposefully onto the stage – carefully coiffed hair and trademark powder blue suits heralding Her Excellency, the first duly elected President of Australia.

In the stands, many stamp their feet and clap and cheer. Others are content to soak up the sunshine and contemplate the five days ahead – a week of wall-to-wall guest speakers, technical presentations, training workshops, sector group meetings, and networking events. If only compulsory professional development had always been this straightforward and fun!

Meanwhile, next door at the five star conference venue overlooking Cable Beach, library and information suppliers from all over the world are gathering in the massive Exhibition Hall to finalise their preparations for Trade Day. Golf carts are on hand to ferry suppliers around the imposing exhibition space. There is an electric buzz in the air – most of it solar powered thanks to Sun Corp.

The centrepiece of the Exhibition Hall looks like the set of a sci-fi movie but is actually a prototype Hawking Quantum Library – the latest in multi-dimensional storage solutions for those 'simply impossible to digitise' legacy print collections. On another stand, the CEO of Libco has just flown into Kimberley International Airport from company headquarters in Seattle. With him is an entourage of guest speakers, specialist product experts, and trainers – not to mention the complete international sales team and more promotional merchandise than his Virgin Galactic suborbital aircraft was actually licensed to carry!

In just 24 hours the Exhibition Hall will be packed with thousands of people for a single frenetic day of new product launches and demonstrations that will leave practitioners agog. All through the venue, in every quiet corner and hallway, deals will be done – deals collectively worth LOTS of money. In return, suppliers will pull out all stops to make this one great annual event truly memorable – at least until the next one in 2031.

Others will benefit financially too. Many years before – when the unsustainable hodge-podge of small library conferences finally drowned in a sea of red ink and was replaced with CLIPA Super Conference Ltd – every library sector group and peak body bought a stake in the new event. Now the substantial profits from each annual super conference flow back to the shareholders and shares are traded as groups wax and wane in influence. CLIPA now owns not only its headquarters in a trendy beachside suburb of Greater Byron Bay, but two commercial office buildings in Wellington and Perth and a highly profitable boutique training company listed on the Sydney stock exchange.

The President of Australia winds up her speech, thanks the audience for their attention and with a blink made heavy by mascara, activates a strategically placed personal rocket pack (Apple's latest iRock) and departs the stage vertically. Across the stadium, full Members of CLIPA login via ePod to record the speech in their PD Log and calculate how many more PD points will be needed for annual re-certification. Happily for many, the conference will provide all the PD points they need and they will return to their organisations not only professionally refreshed but also fully re-certified for another year.

As the first technical presentation of the day commences on stage and appears above the stadium as a gigantic hologram, I scan the sea of earnest, mostly young faces around me and think back 20 years. How far we have come and how much we have achieved in just two decades. What a bright and exciting future we have built for our profession since 2010. It seems like a dream...

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