

Frontline



Graham Black

ALIA President
graham.black@alia.org.au

Feedback to your Board of Directors

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

Email: feedback@alia.org.au with your comments.

Graham Black
President
07 4930 9435
graham.black@alia.org.au

Margaret Allen
Vice-President
08 9427 3328
margaret.allen@alia.org.au

John Bayliss
Director
02 6801 4501
john.bayliss@alia.org.au

Gillian Hallam
Director
0401 678 950
gillian.hallam@alia.org.au

Andrew Hocken
Director
08 89364 1964
andrew.hocken@alia.org.au

Julie Rae
Director
03 9864 9601
julie.rae@alia.org.au

Kate Sinclair
Director
08 8201 3290
kate.sinclair@alia.org.au

I'm actually getting in early for this Frontline. My three previous missives were submitted right on the deadline which – I'm led to believe from some of my predecessors – is a pretty good record. Who knows how long that will last!

As I'm due to go on leave for a month in a few days time, I decided to start writing sooner rather than later as my inspiration and desire to write a Frontline column while I'm on leave could be somewhat lacking. So to give you some idea when I've commenced writing this, Queensland has just won its third State of Origin match, Spain just won the world cup, Stephen Conroy has just announced a delay in the internet filtering legislation, and Cadel Evans has just started wearing the Maillot Jaune. Well the best laid plans of mice and librarians haven't eventuated so I'm now continuing this while I'm holidays.

According to the Macquarie Dictionary sustainable means, "designed or developed to have the capacity to continue operating perpetually, by avoiding adverse effects on the natural environment and depletion of natural resources." According to that other reliable source, Wikipedia, sustainability is "the capacity to endure". If you look up sustainability on Google, it advises that there are 35 000 000 results. It's obviously a popular term.

Librarianship as a profession, career, or activity has obviously been sustained over the course of centuries. As an activity it has continually evolved. There have been numerous times over the past few decades where the role of the library and the roles of those of us who work in libraries has been questioned. I'm sure epitaphs and obituaries have even been prepared for the demise of libraries as institutions and librarianship as a profession.

Indications of our adaptive nature are manifest. One only has to look at new services being offered and new facilities being developed to meet the challenges of an ever changing society and the constant change of technology.

Just as library services and facilities change and adapt, so must ALIA. We certainly can't take for granted our achievements of the past, and the last thing we should do is rest on our laurels. As I wrote in an earlier piece for *inCite* the sustainability of ALIA is entirely dependent on membership – no members, no fees, no association. That's why the 2008 Member Survey has been so important to identify those things which members value highly and those things which don't rate particularly high. The ALIA Board and National Office have been aligning and developing strategies and services to meet these needs.

We need to be responsive to member needs. At the time of writing it looks as if we're doing that pretty well as membership had increased by 4% at the end of June. This is extremely pleasing as the current trend for member organisations is for membership to reduce rather than grow. While that's great news, adapting and being responsive is not without its challenges. While organisms often adapt and change over hundreds, if

not thousands of years, organisations such as ours don't have that luxury. Services we've offered in the past that once upon a time were heavily used can pretty soon become like an appendix: the organ is no longer required but still remains part of the body. Then if the organ becomes infected it can cause the demise of the body. While I'm not aware of ALIA offering any appendix-like services, we certainly need to remain vigilant that we don't. It's the Board's role to ensure ALIA remains a healthy body, so there will be times when we will take pre-emptive action to prevent the maintenance of an appendix-like service.

Financial sustainability is not a luxury, it's essential. ALIA is a company limited by guarantee, so the Board has an obligation to ensure the organisation remains solvent. We're not a large organisation. In terms of finances ALIA's annual operating budget is less than the salaries budget of my rather small university library. With a relatively small budget ALIA needs to focus on meeting the needs of those who pay membership fees. This is no different from other community/profession-based membership organisations. ALIA has often been seen as a caring and sharing organisation – offering services and activities equally to members and non-members alike. I can assure you the Board and ALIA National Office will continue to focus on providing services and activities for members at the expense of non-members.

ALIA's role in the sustainability of the profession is key. ALIA is the body that credentials organisations offering library and information training and education, thus underwriting the quality of qualifications for members and non-members alike. It is also a service we currently offer educational institutions and organisations for free. While this is a service that maintains the heart of the organisation and the profession, it is just one example of where we need to see how we can make it run more effectively and more efficiently.

I'm almost out of Frontline mode and back into holiday mode. I'm currently on a train which is advertised as the green way to travel, and last night I bought a can of beer which was branded as being environmentally friendly with green labelling. Sustainability – it's everywhere and we all need to ensure ALIA remains a most adaptive organisation.

Graham Black ALIA President

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