

# Frontline



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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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By the time you read this, the local and regional National Advisory Congresses (NAC) will be over and we'll be preparing for the national NAC link up. While the NAC provides an opportunity for members to meet with Board members and exchange views and information about ALIA, part of the consultation involves a reflection on the outcomes of last year's meetings with members. As attendance has been low, here's a taste of the discussions.

The theme for the NAC last year was lobbying and advocacy and the main issues raised are available at <http://www.alia.org.au/governance/nac/2009>:

- Some examples of what has been achieved:
- Rollout of the *Every Member an Advocate* Program, including workshops and a toolkit
- Introduction of the ALIA Advocacy Advice Service, including the development of the *Federal Election Campaign Kit*
- Marketing developed for different sectors, and
- Continued communication and marketing of advocacy activities

Furthermore, ALIA has been advocating and making submissions to government on the NBN, cyber-safety, school libraries enquiry, and the book industry. We are also a founding partner of the Safer Internet Group and the National Year of Reading 2012. And the Association has responded to numerous local and state issues around the country, along with continuing our tried, true and successful campaigns of Library and Information Week and National Simultaneous Storytime.

As I've mentioned before, ALIA is a 'broad church', so I'm sure there are groups and sectors which have not been included in our activities over the past year. At the National Roundtable held in May this year the issue of ALIA advocacy was discussed. The Roundtable advised ALIA that it should lobby and advocate on high level issues of strategic and national importance. ALIA of course has the advantage of being an independent organisation and can comment and respond to issues where members may be unable to do so, due to employment or conflict of interest issues.

However, as a member-driven professional organisation, it's equally important that we equip our members to be advocates as well. To malign a much-used saying, advocacy begins at home.

Very often, particularly on local issues, the best advocates are those who are involved and fully understand the situation, hence the importance to ALIA and each member of the *Every Member an Advocate* campaign.

With responsibility comes obligation. While ALIA acknowledges our important role in lobbying and advocacy for and on behalf of members and the LIS sector, it is equally important that we do so in a manner that preserves and maintains the reputation and integrity of the Association and our members. The same is also true for members who advocate of behalf of ALIA. The issues need to be significant, the facts well researched and the lobbying and advocacy undertaken in a professional and respectful manner.

We shouldn't forget that we are all advocates for our own libraries. We are the ones who regularly meet with clients and stakeholders and, as such, we are in positions where we can influence outcomes affecting our organisation. The 'they' sayers more often than not think that this is the role of management and not their job. How wrong could they be? There is a role of advocacy in everybody's job, even though it's not written into position descriptions.

As a library manager I invariably get brickbats about services, resources, and the like. Our VC has established a blog with and for students, so now there is an opportunity for students to send the brickbats about the Library directly to the Vice Chancellor. And yes, I have received a few 'please explain' or comments from his office. In fact, every time I get an email from his office with the heading 'student comment' I grit my teeth and think, "what now?" but the other day I had another teeth-gritting experience, only this time my grimace had turned into a grin. A student had written to the VC commending the library on the actions taken by a staff member regarding some noisy students (thanks Kate!).

Kate and every other staff member who works with our clients have the potential to turn potential advocates into complainants (or vice versa) by how we approach our jobs. I'm sure it's the same in your organisation.

On an entirely different matter, it's budget preparation time for ALIA National Office staff, with the budget being presented to the Board at its December meeting. Although we have seen a small growth in membership this year, it doesn't mean that we don't have financial constraints. I can assure you we certainly do. Like any organisation we need to live within our means, and the Board is determined that we do just that.

To end on a positive note, congratulations to Andrew Wells on being made a Fellow of ALIA, and thanks to the lively crew in Darwin for an engaging NAC. The dinner that followed was definitely Moorish!

## Graham Black ALIA President

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**Interested in Lobbying and Advocacy?  
Contact Graham to discuss your Board nomination.**