Submission from
the Australian Library and Information Association
to
Infrastructure Australia

October 2008

Introduction

The Australian Library and Information Association (ALIA) is the national professional organisation for the library and information sector. It represents 6000 members, the library and information profession, Australian library and information services, and the interests of over 12 million library users.

The Australian Library and Information Association (ALIA) welcomes the call for public submissions to Infrastructure Australia.

ALIA advocates the development of an informed society that can partake and participate in skilled decision-making.

Accurate, relevant and timely information is the key ingredient to effective decision-making. Australia's long-term economic development is dependent on its ability to use information to make decisions that enable growth, progress and productivity.

Libraries and the library profession contribute to an informed society by acquiring, organising, archiving, retrieving, using, synthesising and analysing information and thereby empowering users so that they can utilise this information in their decision-making processes.

ALIA supports the development of a 21st century information infrastructure with libraries as the conduit for a sustainable knowledge economy.

Discussion of Public Private partnerships (PPPs), and of encouragement to greater private investment in the provision of public infrastructure, is outside the scope of this submission.

Libraries as infrastructure

Libraries are so much part of the fabric of our communities that they can be overlooked in terms of infrastructure. They are, however, a crucial part of a community's social, cultural and economic capital. It is a major challenge to convey to decision makers, the breadth, depth and potential impact on the whole community of libraries. Few other services have the multiplicity of roles, or user range and diversity, or potential to influence so many lives.

The Australian library infrastructure includes the: National Library and state libraries, university, TAFE, public, school and special libraries (eg government department, health etc.). The collections from these libraries are supported by professionally produced catalogues, indexes and abstracts, a National Bibliographic database, digital preservation, interlibrary loan, database consortia arrangements all of which underpins world class research, creativity and innovation.

The infrastructure includes not only physical infrastructure such as buildings, fitouts, computer hardware, collections, but also the infrastructure for communications including digital communication, transport and service networks.

Australian public libraries offer a nationally dispersed and uniquely local interconnected infrastructure. Public libraries support early literacy, lifelong learning, social cohesion, and equitable access to the digital economy. They play the role of a virtual branch office' for many government departments, commonwealth and state with their role of supporting access to e-government information.

Public libraries have a crucial role in supporting social inclusion and building community participation. Public libraries…"have the attraction of being generally free, airconditioned and secure, important considerations for seniors with limited incomes" (Services to the over 65's in NSW public libraries, *Australian public libraries and information services* 18(1) March 2005)

Public libraries play a special role in lifelong learning enhancing and promoting community engagement with recognised links to local adult learning facilities, schools, TAFE, universities and distance education. They provide not only a learning space but community space as a place for social contact and connection for interaction across all ages and socioeconomic, cultural and linguistic backgrounds.

At the first meeting of the Government's Social Inclusion Board, a presentation was made about the Hume Global Learning Centre Library as an excellent example of social inclusion. http://www.hume.vic.gov.au/Files/Kevin_Rudd_visits_the_Hume_Global_Learning_Centre.pdf

Public libraries also provide assistive technology for people with physical impairments including accessibility aids such as software programs like JAWS, enlargement programs like Zoomtext and trackball mice.

ALIA believes that it is in the national interest that Australian governments support and facilitate the role of libraries as providers of public information in the digital environment.

Australia's library and information services sector is a dynamic and innovative participant in the information industry. The sector strives for equitable access to information for the Australian community within the context of their work, leisure, educational and cultural pursuits, and to ensure that Australians have the skills to access and utilise this information.

Libraries and information services have a fundamental concern in the preservation of information contained in the published and documentary record in order to ensure enduring access. The Australian Library and Information Association (ALIA) is committed to the preservation of the published and documentary record in all formats, and to providing enduring access to information. Its commitment is implemented by fostering and supporting collaboration among libraries and information services to ensure the preservation of, and access to, these records. ALIA supports new applications of technology and new technology which offer opportunities and tools for meeting the preservation obligation.

Our inherited culture is a rich resource through which we can reach a deeper understanding of our past and the environment in which we live. There are an estimated 41 million objects held in Australian libraries, museums, art galleries and historical collections. Collectively, these objects tell the story of our history and the seminal events which contribute to our sense of identity and national pride.

Important objects do not reside solely in our major museums and collecting institutions. Every community, small regional museum, art gallery, library or historical collection is a custodian of much of our cultural heritage and significant items that are held in trust for all Australians.

The Australian people look to the federal government to provide leadership in upholding their democratic right to equitable access to information and establishing the key role of information in our society and for our economy.

Libraries contribute to meeting these Infrastructure Australia goals:
- *Increased economic standard of living for Australians*
- *Better social outcomes, quality of life and reduced social disadvantage in our cities and our regions.*

Libraries contribute to meeting these Infrastructure Australia Strategic Priorities:
- *Expand Australia's productive capacity*
- *Increase Australia's productivity*
- *Improve social equity, and quality of life, in our cities and our regions*

An investment in information is an investment in knowledge, learning, research and business for Australia's future growth, and social, cultural, economic and knowledge future. It is timely to move beyond technology and connectivity to realising the value of information to our communities, business, and individuals.

Evidence

In 2006-2007, Australian public library statistics indicated that:

6.7 million	people visited our libraries;
179 million	people visited our websites;
7,816	Australian websites were permanently archived;
144 terabytes	of digital collections were stored;
$24.4 million	was spent purchasing resources for collections;
$3.9 billion	was the total asset value of our collections; and
$970.8 million	was the total asset value of our buildings/sites

Australian public libraries statistical report 2005-2006: final report. Compiled by Public Library Services, State Library of Queensland, September 2007. http://www.nsla.org.au/

Statistics from the Australian Bureau of Statistics revealed that, after the cinema, libraries were the cultural venue most Australians attended that year. Sixty-five percent of Australians aged 15 and over who had visited a library during 2005-06 had visited more than six times, including 25% who had actually visited more than 20 times.
Australian Bureau of Statistics, Attendance at Selected Cultural Venues and Events, Australia, 2005-06, cat. no. 4114.0, ABS, Canberra.

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—they made 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 libraries, health libraries, law libraries and other special libraries.

There are direct economic benefits when a community's infrastructure includes a well resourced library:

- Engaging in life-long learning through using the library's resources and services in areas such as adult literacy and technology/computers increases a person's capacity to participate in the economy and the community;
- Public libraries offer the nation's workforce access to the training and tools that they need to increase their skills and productivity for long-term economic success;
- A person who uses their local library is eight times more like to make a purchase in a bookshop than someone who doesn't use their library;
- A library's purchasing input can be significant for a small town's economy;
- the British Library calculates that it generates economic value for the community around 4.4 times the level of its public funding. This measure incorporates the social capital the institution generates. British Library (2004) *Measuring our value*. London, British Library http://www.bl.uk/pdf/measuring.pdf

The recent New South Wales report on the value of public libraries states that:

Economic benefit, that is the financial amount saved relative to the cost of purchasing materials, was found to average $325 per annum among surveyed library users. This aligned closely with a more structured estimate of a statewide benefit of $1.216 billion, which equates to a benefit-cost ratio of 4.24 against the 2004-2005 investment of $287 million. Thus for each dollar expended on public libraries, $4.24 of economic benefit is generated.

Economic activity measures the contribution of public libraries to the economy in real terms and was estimated at $810.2 million. Thus for each dollar expended on public libraries, $2.82 of real economic activity is generated.

Library Council of New South Wales. *Enriching communities: the value of public libraries in New South Wales, March 2008.p i.*

WHAT ARE THE PROBLEMS

The issues and challenges for libraries include:

- Need to improve literacy skills, including information and computer literacy, so that all Australians can participate in our democratic society and digital environment
- Provision of national broadband access
- Implementation of a national digital preservation program
- Development of national online quality resources
- Improved recognition and support for the delivery of government services through public libraries
- Need to review legislation and administrative arrangements supporting public libraries within states and territories
- Funding for library buildings, resources/collections, services and staff
- Need to review of copyright in the digital environment and the impact on library services
- Planning for workforce and work skills in the library industry
- Funding to maintain collections of national significance.

WHAT ARE THE IMPACTS OF THESE PROBLEMS

Literacy
The Australian Bureau of Statistics' report *Adult literacy and life skills survey*, found 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.
ABS 4228.0 - *Adult Literacy and Life Skills Survey*, Summary Results, Australia, 2006

Information and literacy skills are vital—recent research has found that they are associated with individual and business success. A US study found:

The habit of daily reading, for instance, overwhelmingly correlates with better reading skills and higher academic. On the other hand, poor reading skills correlate with lower levels of financial and job success.

Information literacy

More and more Australians are becoming computer literate. Many of these are not sufficiently information literate and with the creation of information and use of electronic information resources increasing the need for information skills training has never been more critical. Information literacy skills give individuals the capability to recognise a need for information and access, evaluate and use that information efficiently and effectively. Training in responsible use of the internet is a socially responsible approach to enabling users to enjoy positive internet experiences. *Investing in information* would design and develop both online interactive and face-to-face user training programs and training for library and information professionals to deliver these programs within their educational, research, government and business communities. Better information creation and use will ensure that Australia is not only competitive but takes a leading role in the global information and knowledge economies.

Most communities have access to a public library, and these libraries have high levels of use by those sectors of the community who would generally not have the financial resources or skills to access electronic information resources. Australia's public library network is ideally placed to help to bridge the information divide, both in rural and urban areas.

Adequate funding is required to establish the public library as the focal community access point for publicly available electronic information and government interactive electronic resources, and school grants to support ICT and access to online databases and resources. In addition to funding for ICT there would be funding for a national information skills and literacy public education and training program centred in Australia's public libraries.

Administrative arrangements

Public library services are delivered by a variety of administrative arrangements. These vary both between and within each State and Territory, ranging from services wholly delivered by the State/Territory through to services wholly delivered by Local Government.

Funding

The funding for public libraries is nationally inconsistent and inadequate causing inequitable access to information and propounding a reduction in literacy skills.

National online resources

Electronic Resources Australia (ERA) is administered by the National Library of Australia as a not-for-profit Australian library consortium. The purpose of ERA is to enable Australian libraries to collaboratively purchase full-text electronic resources for their clients. ERA was developed in response to recommendation 9 of the Senate's October 2003 report on *Libraries in the Online Environment*.

Through ERA's cross-sectoral collaboration (national/state/territory, academic, specials, public, TAFE and school libraries), Australian libraries stand to achieve the greatest common good for all Australian library users. In an era of the Internet and ever-expanding electronic services, direct and immediate access to online information is fundamental to a well-informed, educated, economically competitive and democratic society.

Australians would benefit through access to national online quality resources that support business, vocational, government, educational and community activities. These resources would be a very tangible step towards overcoming the isolation experienced daily by those living in rural and remote regions of Australia by facilitating their access to reliable and readily available information sources. 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.

National digital preservation program
Australia lacks an adequately funded national research and cultural digital preservation program. Funding is required to provide Australian culture online with a nationally funded digital program, rather than requiring libraries and other cultural organisations to reduce other services to provide digital collections

Digital preservation of information is a key infrastructure.requirement for a 21st century future. Preservation and access continue to be core library areas of practice and expertise. ALIA's core values include the 'Preservation of the human record' and ALIA supports partnerships to advance these objectives. Libraries and information services have a fundamental concern in the preservation of information contained in the published and documentary record in order to ensure enduring access.

The Australian Library and Information Association is committed to the preservation of the published and documentary record in all formats, and to providing enduring access to information. Its commitment is implemented by fostering and supporting collaboration among libraries and information services to ensure the preservation of, and access to, these records. ALIA supports new applications of technology and new technology which offer opportunities and tools for meeting the preservation obligation.

Much of the record of Australia is contained in its libraries—particularly national, state and public libraries. The incredibly rapid growth in the delivery of information in electronic formats has left organisations responsible for the preservation of, and access to, this information unable to adequately meet their obligations, in part because of the complexity of technological, economic and organisational requirements, and inadequate deposit legislation. Dealing with this new digital environment requires additional funding not less. The risk is that some information may be lost forever. Significant information that is on the web today may not be there tomorrow. Government publications appear and disappear on the web on a daily basis. The National Library is attempting to archive 'culturally significant' websites with its Pandora project.
Australian Library and Information Association *Inquiry into the Effects of the Ongoing Efficiency Dividend on Smaller Public Sector Agencies*

The UNESCO Memory of the World Programme, started in 1992, recognises that the documentary heritage, reflecting the 'memory of the world', is a fragile thing, requiring a sustained campaign to ensure the longer-term survival of valuable archive holdings and library collections from around the world.

Government services

Library infrastructure in Australia is significant, integrated and sustainable and yet largely ignored and overlooked by Commonwealth government departments as a means of providing equitable access to commonwealth government information.

National broadband

Access to the Internet through a new national broadband network will open a door to information for many Australians. Computers in schools will also increase access.

Access to the internet, and particularly to broadband, is an extremely important enabler for the delivery of better health, education, community and emergency services in regional, rural and remote Australia, particularly as many government services are increasing online service delivery to clients. The Library Council of New South Wales *Report NSW Public Libraries and eGovernment 2006* identifies the increasing use of libraries for this purpose, particularly regional libraries.

The Library Council of New South Wales *Report: NSW Public Libraries and eGovernment, 2006.* http://www.sl.nsw.gov.au/pls/publications/pdf/egov.pdf

Copyright in the digital environment

Each year libraries provide a range of services to millions of researchers, students and members of the public. These services are performed in conformity with copyright law. Librarians are aware of the advances in digital technology and wish to take advantage of the efficiency which digital technology offers to their information services. They are equally aware that digital technology poses a threat to copyright protection and are sympathetic to the needs of copyright holders.

Copyright protection should encourage, not inhibit use and creativity. Copyright law should not give rights holders the power to use technological or contractual measures to override the exceptions and limitations to copyright and distort the balance set in international and domestic copyright law. It is in the public interest to have access to information in all formats. And it is the public duty of libraries to provide access to copyright material.

While the library community strongly supports the exceptions granted under copyright law, there are some areas where different procedures and policies need to be changed or developed. Of particular interest to ALIA's members are the following: Definition of a work, Fair dealing, Library provisions, Use of technological devices, Safe harbours, Compulsory licenses and collecting societies, Contract verses copyright, Right of first digitisation, and Duration of copyright.

Libraries and their users need effective, well balanced national copyright laws that recognise not only the copyright owners' right to remuneration, but also the critical purpose of public information, education and research.

HOW MIGHT THESE PROBLEMS BE ADDRESSED

Some of the initiatives that would help to address these problems include:
- ALIA Public Libraries Summit (to be held in March 2008)
- National adult literacy @ your library program
- National bookstart program
- National early literacy story time program
- National information and computer literacy program

WHAT SHOULD BE DONE FIRST

- National adult literacy @ your library program

CONCLUSION

Investment in libraries can be expected to generate economic as well as social, cultural and environmental benefits. Libraries sustain the community in social, cultural and environmental terms and contribute positively in terms of economic value, benefit and activity.

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