



Submission in response to the ACT Legislative Assembly Standing Committee on Environment and Transport and City Services inquiry into ACT Libraries

18 September 2018

1. About us

The Australian Library and Information Association (ALIA) is the professional organisation for the Australian library and information services sector.

On behalf of our 5,000 personal and institutional members, we provide the national voice of the profession in the development, promotion and delivery of quality library and information services to the nation, through leadership, advocacy and mutual support. We represent school, public, academic, research, corporate, law, health, government, national, state and territory libraries and the professionals who work in them.

Australian public libraries

Australia has more than 1500 central, branch and mobile libraries, with 9.3 million registered members and more than 113 million customer visits each year¹. Offering books, magazines, newspapers, DVDs, wifi, PC internet access, learning programs, fun activities and expert staff help, they are a much loved, highly regarded and trusted community resource. Families with young children are an important audience and there are some 121,000 storytimes held each year, with more than 3.1 million participants.

The public library sector within ALIA is represented by the ALIA Australian Public Library Alliance². The ALIA Australian Public Library Alliance commissioned the *ALIA Standards, Guidelines and Outcome Measures*³, which are the benchmark for Australian public libraries and have been used by at least one other country overseas to review their own standards.

2. Introduction

We welcome this opportunity to contribute to the Act inquiry into its libraries. Public libraries across Australia are transforming their facilities, programs, services, technologies and staff skills to meet the challenges of our increasingly digital society. Public libraries in the ACT are no exception.

¹ https://www.nsla.org.au/sites/default/files/documents/nsla.aust-pub-lib-stats_2015-16.pdf

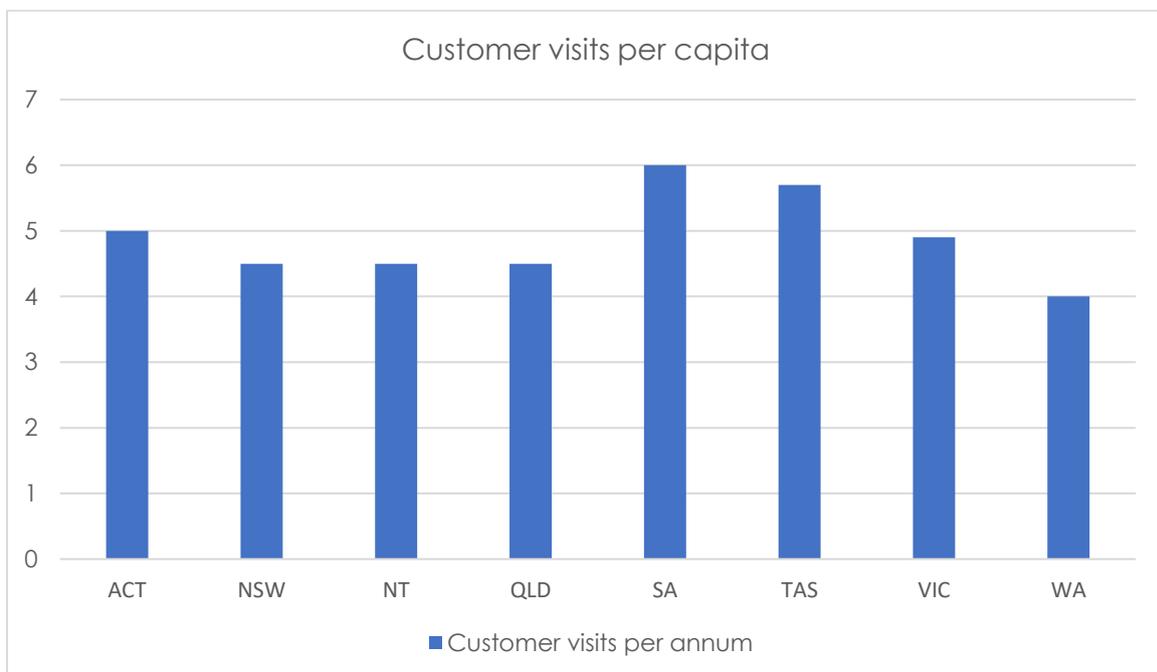
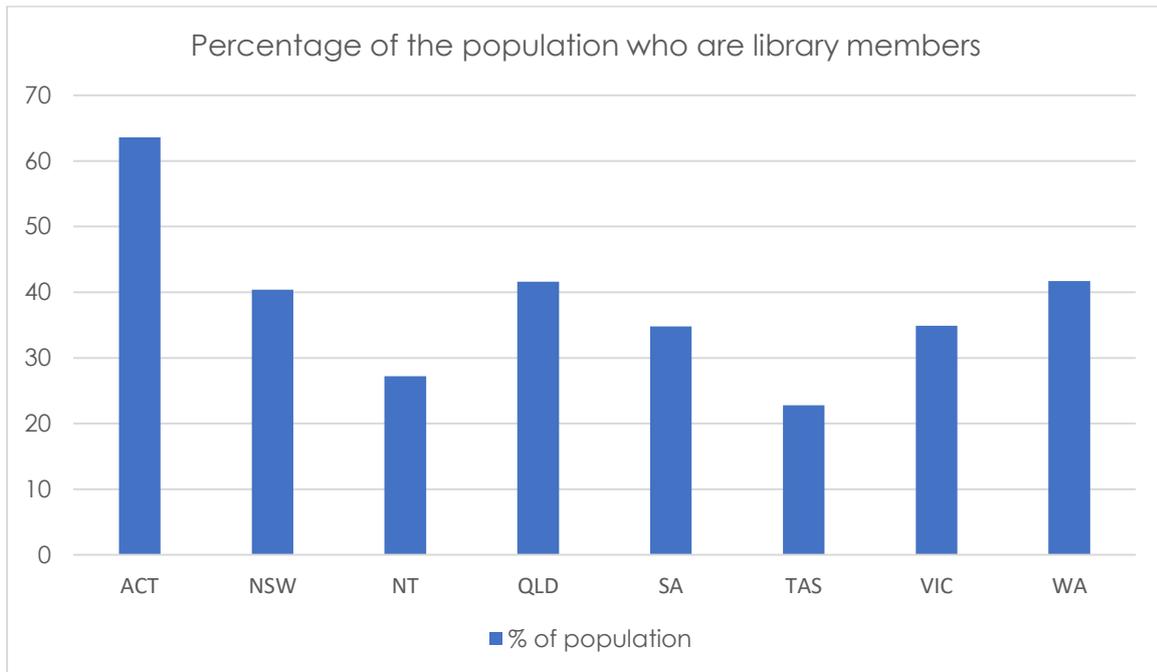
² <https://www.alia.org.au/node/184/public-libraries>

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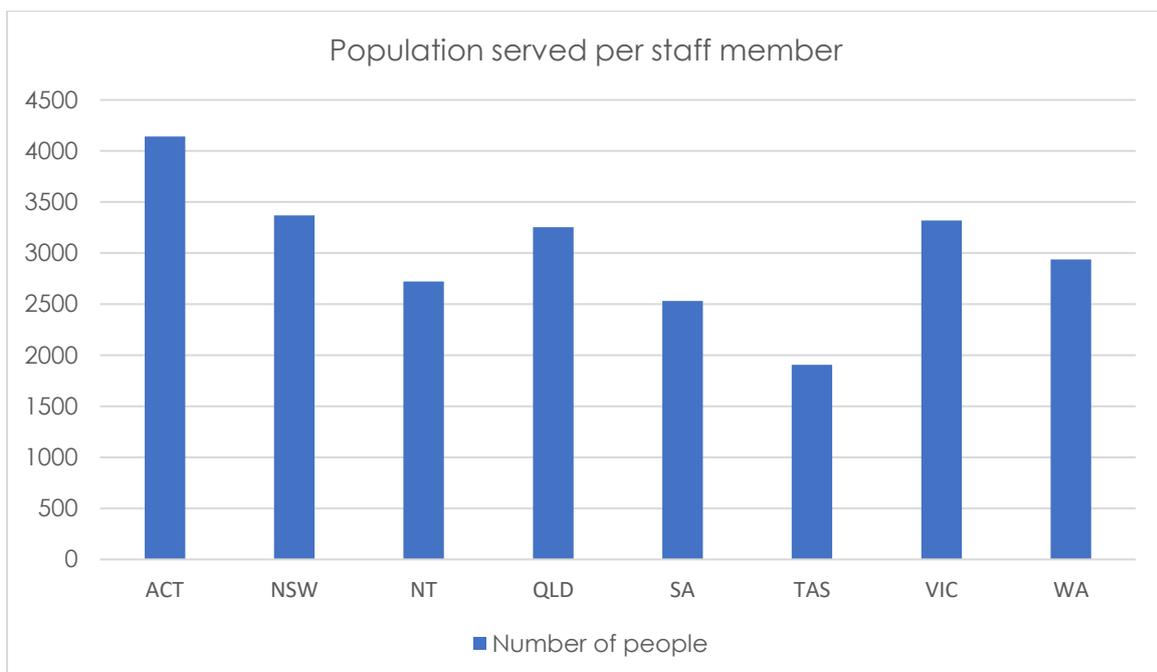
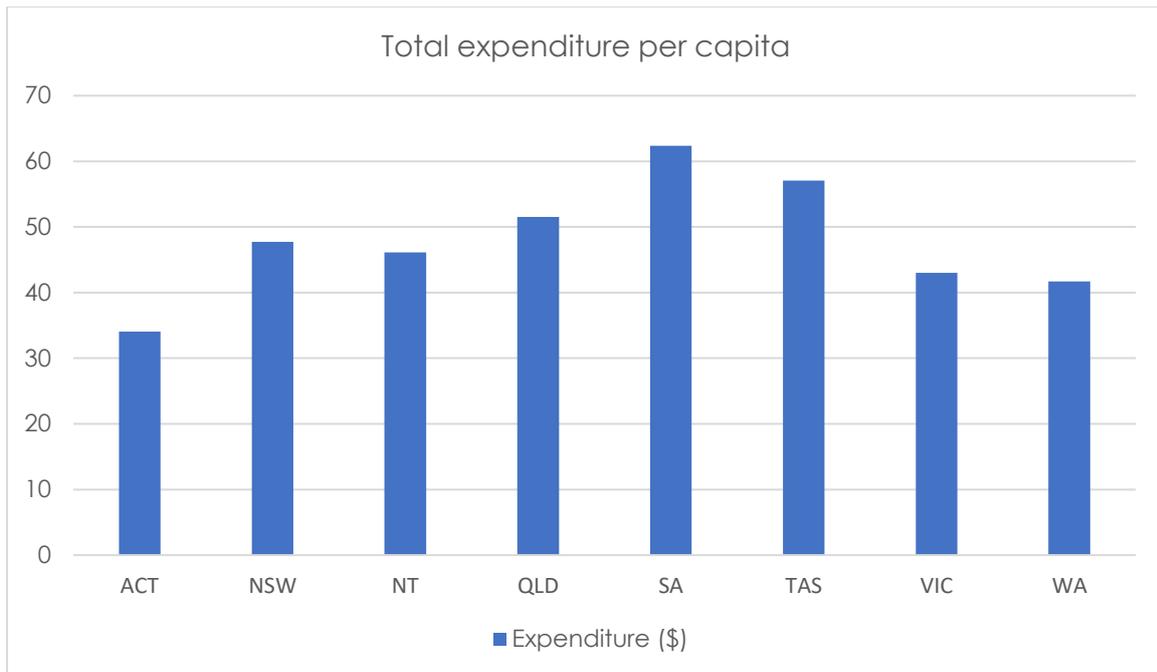
<https://www.alia.org.au/sites/default/files/Guidelines%20Standards%20and%20Outcome%20Measures%20for%20Australian%20Public%20Libraries.pdf>

3. Comparison with other states and territories

According to the latest national public library statistics, ACT libraries have the highest membership (63.6% of the population) and the third highest number of customer visits per annum per capita (5), yet the total expenditure per capita is the lowest in Australia (\$34.06) as is the staffing level (one staff member per 4,143 residents)⁴.



⁴ https://www.nsla.org.au/sites/default/files/documents/nsla.aust-pub-lib-stats_2015-16.pdf



These figures paint a picture of Libraries ACT as a well-used, highly valued, tightly managed, efficient library service. They also suggest that there is little capacity to embrace new opportunities as they arise.

4. Libraries ACT's reputation

Libraries ACT has a strong reputation in the Australian library world, for:

- Community engagement leading to authentic community-focused programs
- Adopting new technologies where they bring benefit to their users and make for more efficient operations
- Promoting digital inclusion initiatives so no-one need feel left behind

- Measuring and evaluating programs and services, and benchmarking with other libraries.

Libraries ACT is known as an innovator, most recently for:

- Its success in early literacy for pre-schoolers and in adult literacy programs for migrants, both English-speaking and non-English speaking
- The appointment of a coordinator to improve services for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people
- Its investment in technology, embracing the broader future of libraries as digital hubs, creative spaces, maker spaces
- Workforce training and professional development.

5. Future opportunities and challenges

The future for public libraries in the ACT, Australia-wide and worldwide is constantly evolving. Public libraries remain one of the best-loved and most valued services provided by state, territory and local governments, but further investment is needed to meet increasing user needs and expectations.

- While book borrowing in print will remain a core service, there is a much greater emphasis on digital formats and tech services – public access computers, ebooks, free WiFi.
- Libraries have always been the trusted place for information and libraries track more than 8.3 million reference and information requests every year – many of them seeking support in accessing government websites and online forms.
- Libraries have an increasing part to play in child and family community services, with baby rhyme-time and story-time and STEM activities seen as playing a crucial role in early childhood learning, language and literacy development.
- There is an understanding that libraries are for everyone and no-one is turned away. The universal nature of the service puts libraries at the frontline of population growth, with an ever-increasing user base not necessarily matched by greater capacity and more resources.
- Libraries need to be located in easily accessible centres, on good transport routes, and ideally co-located with retail and complementary government services.
- Staff employed in libraries need ongoing support to develop their skills in an ever-evolving information environment.

6. Recommendations

Libraries ACT is currently providing an excellent service to residents in the capital and doing so in an efficient and cost-effective way within the Territory Government. Libraries ACT is known as an innovator in the library world and has made best use of the opportunities arising from the introduction of digital technologies.

For this situation to continue, we recommend that the Standing Committee examine the following:

- A deliberative co-design approach to future library programs, services, physical buildings and locations, along the Aarhus model⁵
- A funding model to compare with that of other large city library services in Australia.

7. Conclusion

ALIA welcomes the opportunity to contribute to this consultation and we would be pleased to provide further input about any of the points raised in this submission.

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⁵ https://www.aakb.dk/sites/www.aakb.dk/files/files/file_attachments/2013-06-25_1210/the_librarys_voice_eng1.pdf