



Australian
Library and
Information
Association

ALIA NAC Regional Reports 2009

**QUT Gardens Point Campus, Owen J Wordsworth Room
Brisbane
5:30 pm, 9 September 2009**

The meeting was facilitated by Helen Partridge, ALIA Director. The report was prepared by Claudia Davies, QLD Local Liaison Officer.

1. Attendance:

Maria Bowdler, Rowena Brannigan, Josella Chan, Claudia Davies (Qld Local Liaison Officer), Bonnie Dixon, Andrew Forster, Corrinne Hills, Vicki McDonald, Craig Milne, Katrina Nurthen, Rebecca Randle, Robyne Sandison-Miller, Helen Partridge (ALIA Director), Susan Stockwell, Jennifer Thomas.

Apologies:

Joanne Beazley, Denise Cadman, Rachel Crowe, Merindi Derrick, Helen Gambley, Kathryn Harding, Robyn Lather, David Mason, Susan Oag, Jennifer Parker, Deborah Ponting

2. Selected representative to attend the national meeting of the NAC

Name: Corrinne Hills

ALIA membership no. 048292

The Brisbane meeting commenced with the question "why do you come to an NAC; what do you get out of it". The members' responses included:

- To hear other people's ideas and see what challenges other library sector workers are facing.
- It's an opportunity to network with people from different types of libraries and get a wider perspective.
- To see how ALIA is supporting the profession and representing us to the world.
- To take time to pause and reflect.

3. Review of the outcomes from the 2008 NAC topic '*Staying smart in a complicated world - professional development*'

After listening to Helen's introduction, members volunteered the following as ALIA PD initiatives which have been introduced following the 2008 NAC:

- PD Postings
- FOLIOz courses and the new partnership (Lyrisis)
- ProQuest deal

Helen also noted that ALIA had employed a part-time Professional Development and Careers Manager in recognition of the importance of this issue.

4. Discussion topic: ***Lobbying and Advocacy: working together to make a difference***

The following questions were put to the meeting, and responses are summarised below:

1. *What is lobbying and advocacy? How is it different to marketing?*

- Lobbying is when ALIA represents the membership.
- Lobbying is about taking on issues on behalf of members, and informing workplaces (employers), library clients, and the world at large.
- Lobbying is “speaking loudly” – sometimes, those that speak loudest get what they ask for.
- Lobbying is of a higher order and is more strategic than marketing.
- The general feeling was that ALIA campaigns were more marketing than lobbying.

When discussing what members know about the advocacy and lobbying ALIA is doing, the members had the following to say:

- The advocacy work of ALIA is “hidden”. It needs to be made more available to members.
- Don’t really know what ALIA does. Need to raise awareness.
- It is important to know what we are *going* to do – not just what we have done once it’s finished – to raise awareness that we are working on advocacy.
- Derek Whitehead (past President) did a good job of raising the profile of advocacy work by engaging the membership – blog, press etc. Members would like to see more of this engagement.
- The approach to advocacy is influenced by who is President at the time.

Members identified the following areas where ALIA is doing advocacy

- Copyright
- Public Libraries Summit
- Parallel imports
- Censorship

But not campaigns – these were seen more as raising the profile of public libraries but not relevant to other sectors.

2. *Why is lobbying and advocacy important to our profession and how can we do it better?*

- There’s lots of talk in the media that libraries will die in the future. It’s important that we are head on the continued relevance of libraries, and to promote how our role is evolving.

- There is a need to advocate in the employment arena. Employers are increasingly employing unqualified or underqualified people in library roles. We need to promote what it means to be a librarian or a library technician, and the value they bring to an organisation.
- While ALIA has work level guidelines and resources, they are written for the library sector. We should produce them in a form which can be given to employers outside of the library.
- ALIA needs to be out there promoting our value and identity to employer groups. Both our profession and our qualifications are undervalued in industry. Libraries, particularly special and corporate libraries, are seen as an overhead, rather than contributors to the value of the organisation.
- The general public don't really understand what we do/our value. "Libraries are only books". One public librarian noted that a patron asked her whether they had to pay to use the library. The general public also doesn't realise how many types of libraries there are beyond public and school libraries.
- Non-library workers don't understand the difference between librarians, library technicians and library assistants. The meeting felt however, that this was "our hang up, not theirs" – so long as everyone is doing their job well and satisfying the client/customer, does it really matter that they call everyone at the front desk a librarian?
- We don't necessarily have a clear perception of who we are or what we do.
- We should be tying our advocacy work back to the objects of the association. A good example was the recent email about banned books in the USA. The email tied our work in the area of censorship back to our objects and core values.
- Important messages:
 - Transferability of our skills to non-traditional roles
 - The role of library workers in education
 - You can't Google everything
 - Libraries fill many functions in the community besides lending services e.g. training and meeting spaces

Before discussing how we can do it better, the meeting was asked "are we doing it well now?" The response was a clear "we don't know". This tied back to the discussion on raising members' awareness of our advocacy work.

The meeting was asked "what are your expectations or what would you like"

- An advocacy newsletter or alerting service.
- A Stephen Abram / Canadian style approach to 'every member an advocate'. Provide coordinated training to members in different locations so that members can do a lot of the advocating – in acknowledgment that ALIA has a very small number of staff who operate in the advocacy area. With training, we can achieve a coordinated program of advocacy – different area, same message.
- Chris Batt / MLA (Museums, Libraries and Archives Council, UK) model of key messages and sound bites. Similar to facts and figures in the *Little Book of Public Libraries*. So if you are seated at a dinner party, or in the same elevator as an influential figure, you can deliver 2 or 3 key messages / facts about libraries succinctly and powerfully without having to think about it or formulate an argument. You're already prepared.
- Shout more!

3. *What issues should ALIA be lobbying government about?*

- Issues that affect the community where the public doesn't have a strong voice, or where they don't necessarily have the expertise or knowledge to make a difference e.g. copyright.
- Internet safety.
- Freedom of information. China was cited as an extreme example of internet censorship. Australia should not go down the path of nationally controlled censorship.
- Access to information for everyone.
- Privacy in a post 9/11 world. Members noted that the FBI raided libraries in the States following 9/11, demanding patron records.
- Funding. It was noted that libraries across the United States are closing due to funding cuts. Once you're at this stage, it's already too late. So we need to be promoting the value of libraries, and the real costs of losing them, before it becomes a problem.
- Opening up overly restrictive IT environments in many government agencies. Librarians need to use web 2.0 tools to reach customers but many of these tools and websites are banned in government institutions because of security fears. Lobby government and educate them on how these tools can be used.

4. *What tools and resources do you need for advocacy?*

- Training (for example, following the Canadian model)
- An advocacy kit for members. The *Information Literacy Forum Advocacy Kit 2003* and *Dealing with the media* resource etc were seen as a small step in the right direction (<http://membership.alia.org.au/lib/pdf/advocacy/literacy.kit.pdf>)
- Facts sheets – punchy one page documents written with employer groups etc in mind – what's the basic story, facts etc.
- Position papers on key issues.
- Work level guidelines written for employers.

5. *How can we be more engaged with lobbying and advocacy?*

- The ALIA Queensland Library Technicians group is a leading example of groups involved in advocacy. They've engaged with TAFE educators and students and have been invited to address the students twice a year. They get out and talk to library workers who aren't ALIA members and challenge their perceptions, and they undertake regional trips to engage with regional library workers.
- Chris McKenzie of Yarra Plenty Library writes a blog (*News from the CEO* <http://www.yarraplentylibrary.blogspot.com/>) which discusses important issues in really simple language relating key messages to the public at an appropriate level. The clarity of the message makes it easier to come to grips with the issues. The meeting felt that if we could use more of this writing style, it would lead to more engagement.

- Make better use of Web 2.0 tools – use different channels outside of the main stream media to get the message across. Make use of *Wikipedia*.

What roles do employers and ALIA members have?

- ALIA members can promote the profession within their organisations.
- Employers can employ qualified staff and pay them appropriately.
- Employers can provide career progression opportunities and support professional development.

The meeting recognised that this all needs funding and resources.

5. Local issues

The meeting ran out of time to discuss local issues.

6. Any other comments from the meeting?

The members felt strongly that they don't just want to be told what's been done in the way of advocacy; they want to know what issues are coming up and how ALIA is going to respond. But further, members wanted to know what they can do to be a part of any response. ALIA should engage the members in advocacy work. It is then members' responsibility to act, but their reward would be a sense of achievement in contributing and affecting change.

Thank you to all those members who provided evaluation of the NAC to assist ALIA in planning for future NACs. Thank you also to the Queensland University of Technology for providing a venue for the NAC.

7. Evaluation

Thirteen people signed the attendance sheet (exclusive of the ALIA Director and LLO). Of those, 13 (100%) provided feedback via the Regional Meeting Evaluation Form. The feedback is summarised below.

Most attendees rated aspects of the congress highly:

- 100% of members rated the opportunity to participate in, and contribute to, discussions as good or excellent (Mean score 4.8/5);
- 92% of members rated the program and content as good or excellent (Mean score 4.5/5); and
- 100% of members rated the organisational aspects as good or excellent (Mean score 4.8/5).

The opportunity to meet other members and discuss opinions and issues with them, and the opportunity to have a say on important issues came out strongly in the feedback as the most valuable aspect of the meeting. The emphasis on lobbying and the profession was also mentioned.

A third of the attendees would have liked more people to attend, further reinforcing the value of a diversity of members and opinions. Other suggestions for improvement included:

- A later time e.g. 6pm to allow for travel from workplace
- More lead time for questions; and
- More time for discussion.

Additionally, members commented that:

- this year's NAC was a good response to the membership survey;
- ALIA should continue to hold NACs and progress what was discussed tonight; and finally
- The best NAC session I've been to.