



Australian
Library and
Information
Association

18 July 2008

Mr Russell Chafer
Secretary
Joint Committee of Public Accounts and Audit (Parliament of Australia)
House of Representatives
Parliament House
CANBERRA ACT 2600

Dear Mr Chafer

The Australian Library and Information Association (ALIA) welcomes the *Inquiry into the effects of the ongoing efficiency dividend on smaller public sector agencies* and the opportunity to present this submission.

ALIA is the national professional organisation for the Australian library and information sector. It seeks to empower the profession in the development, promotion and delivery of quality library and information services to the nation, through leadership, advocacy and mutual support. It represents 6000 members, the library and information profession, Australian library and information services, and the interests of over 12 million library users. <http://www.alia.org.au>

ALIA has among its key objectives, 'Promotion of the free flow of information and ideas through open access to recorded knowledge, information, and creative works' and 'Preservation of the human record'.

The outcomes of this inquiry as it relates to the National Library of Australia are therefore of particular significance to ALIA and the organisations it supports and represents.

If you require any further information please do not hesitate to contact me at Sue.Hutley@alia.org.au or by telephone 02 6215 8215.

Yours sincerely,

Sue Hutley
ALIA Executive Director



Introduction

The Australian Library and Information Association (ALIA) welcomes the *Inquiry into the effects of the ongoing efficiency dividend on smaller public sector agencies* and the opportunity to present this submission.

ALIA is the national professional organisation for the Australian library and information services sector and represents 6000 members, the library and information profession, Australian library and information services, and the interests of over 12 million library users.

ALIA's submission supports the immense and valuable contribution that the National Library of Australia provides to all Australians. The National Library of Australia plays a pivotal and crucial role in the intellectual life of Australia. This role has a direct effect on the economic prosperity and social health of Australia, as well as on the continuing vitality of Australia's culture and heritage. The value of the National Library and its collections, most especially as a legal deposit collection, is absolutely vital to our democracy.

Democracy and access to recorded knowledge

ALIA has among its key objectives, 'Promotion of the free flow of information and ideas through open access to recorded knowledge, information, and creative works'. Freedom can be protected in a democratic society only if its citizens have unrestricted access to information and ideas. A thriving culture, economy, and democracy require the free flow of information and ideas.

Fundamental to that free flow of information and ideas are Australia's library and information services. They are a legacy to each generation, conveying the knowledge of the past and the promise of the future.

ALIA is concerned that the National Library's capacity to perform the core function of collecting the nation's recorded knowledge, information, and creative works is severely diminished by the effects of the efficiency dividend.

The role of the National Library of Australia is to ensure that documentary resources of national significance relating to Australia and the Australian people, as well as significant non-Australian library materials, are collected, preserved and made accessible either through the Library itself or through collaborative arrangements with other libraries and information providers.

The value of the National Library and its collections is absolutely vital to our democracy. It is imperative to ensure that the National Library is able to continue to build its collections for future generations of Australians.

Sectoral libraries access

All types of libraries in Australia, including public, school, university, special and TAFE, use the resources and services of the National Library of Australia. Law librarians, as an example, rely on many of the efforts and programs of the National Library in order to provide access to laws, especially for digital information.

The practice of law, and in particular litigation, is by its nature retrospective; a problem or dispute occurs which may take 2-5 years to reach a court. Therefore law librarians need to access information as it was in the past. A particular example is the loss of information that occurs when portfolios and departments change their websites: often the National Library's Pandora website is the only place to go to find out what materials were available at a certain point in time. In some cases, legislative instruments promulgated by a department (eg telecommunications determinations) are only available on a government website, and when that website changes or disappears so too does the legislation that once existed. This is rare, but access to laws is crucial to the administration of justice.

The Library's role in the collection of digital resources, and its national role and focus in this area, is especially critical and the Library's viability in this role is at risk because of the reduced funding.

Preservation of the human record

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 (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.

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.

Facilitating access and content for the nation

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.

Libraries Australia is a resource sharing service coordinated by the National Library of Australia for Australian libraries and their users. It is used for reference, collection development, cataloguing and interlibrary lending. The heart of Libraries Australia is the Australian National Bibliographic Database (ANBD), which records the location details of over 42 million items held in most Australian academic, research, national, state, public and special libraries. The importance of this service in facilitating access to information and resources for all Australians cannot be underestimated.

Collaborative activities

The National Library of Australia is active at the national level in leading and participating in collaborative activities for the library and information sector in Australia, Oceania and the Asia-Pacific region. The effect of the efficiency dividend has been to reduce the activities of the National Library in its support and leadership role in the Australian library and information sector.

The Community Heritage Grants Program (CHG) is administered by the National Library. This program distributes grants of up to \$15,000 to assist community organisations to preserve their nationally significant cultural heritage collections. The program has been operating for twelve years and has distributed over \$2m to 505 organisations. The reduced funding from the efficiency dividend may put this crucial community program at risk, which would diminish our nation's cultural heritage.

The National Library participates in several collaborative activities aimed at improving Australia's research information infrastructure, through Australian university repositories.

The National Library of Australia is represented on a number of international standards bodies and organisations. The development of international cataloguing standards, such as the RDA (revision of AACR2), will directly affect every library in Australia. It is crucial that the National Library be able to continue its leadership role in this area by providing expert staff and training for all types of libraries.

The National Library is also active in the activities of the International Federation of Library Associations and Institutions (IFLA), of which ALIA is also a member. Australia has been honoured to have been selected as the host country for the IFLA2010 World Library and Information Congress to be held in Brisbane in August 2010, and the National Library's participation on the National Committee for this event is very important. Their support however to this and other library conferences has diminished.

Conclusion

The Australian Library and Information Association strongly advocates that the National Library of Australia be exempted from the efficiency dividend so that the National Library's capacity to perform its core functions and to provide leadership in the digital economy is not diminished.

The National Library of Australia plays a crucial role in promoting the free flow of information and ideas in the interest of all Australians and a thriving culture, economy and democracy.