



Submission No 26

Inquiry into Australia's aid program and its impact on human rights and security in the Pacific

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Joint Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs, Defence and Trade Inquiry into Australia's aid program in the Pacific

Submission from the National Library of Australia

This submission deals with the term of reference to support peace-building and community and civil society development. It outlines the role of libraries and the limited way that the National Library has provided assistance to libraries in the Pacific region.

Role of libraries

In many Pacific countries public libraries, including national libraries, are often the main public internet access point, and the major source of reference and recreational reading materials. The majority of Pacific region libraries have small and ageing book stocks, have very limited staffing (and often no paid or professional staff), limited reader facilities and they often have difficulty acquiring and maintaining technology. The National Library of the Solomon Islands, for example, has no Internet access and no telephone service at the present time.

Assistance provided by the National Library of Australia

The National Library of Australia has neither the infrastructure nor funds to provide a formal aid program for countries in the region, but does provide a limited amount of ad hoc assistance upon request. Assistance is provided to national libraries, or where there is no national library, to another major library. A more formal program with limited funding operated until 2003.

In 2006 this has included:

- the provision of books to the value of \$3,200 to the National Library of the Solomon Islands;
- travel and conference registration funding for the librarian of the Dili Institute of Technology, East Timor, to attend the recent Australian Library and Information Association Conference in Perth and visit the Northern Territory Library; and
- the provision of books to update the reference collection of the National Library of the Cook Islands (in progress).

The National Library of Australia has been working with AusAid to promote library-based positions for the Australian Youth Ambassadors for Development (AYAD) scheme in the Pacific and Asia. This approach is proving more successful than previous programs which brought librarians to Australia for short training programs or provided intensive in-country courses for small numbers of staff. There are few trained librarians in most Pacific countries, so longer-term training, as well as impartial assessment of existing services and aid opportunities, as is occurring through AYAD placements, is proving more effective than narrowly focussed short courses.

The National Library of Australia maintains an online directory of libraries in the Pacific region <http://www.nla.gov.au/lap/>, and in 2003 assisted with the production of a printed version of the directory for free distribution in the region. Libraries listed are able to update their entries, or can supply information to be added to the entries on their behalf. There are problems with the currency of the data, which will persist until all participants are able to make use of the Internet.