



COMMONWEALTH OF AUSTRALIA

# Official Committee Hansard

## SENATE

ENVIRONMENT, COMMUNICATIONS, INFORMATION  
TECHNOLOGY AND THE ARTS REFERENCES COMMITTEE

**Reference: Role of libraries in the online environment**

THURSDAY, 28 NOVEMBER 2002

SYDNEY

BY AUTHORITY OF THE SENATE

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**SENATE**  
**ENVIRONMENT, COMMUNICATIONS, INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY**  
**AND THE ARTS REFERENCES COMMITTEE**

**Thursday, 28 November 2002**

**Members:** Senator Allison (*Chair*), Senator Tierney (*Deputy Chair*), Senators Lundy, Mackay, Tchen and Wong

**Participating members:** Senators Abetz, Bolkus, Boswell, Brown, Buckland, George Campbell, Carr, Chapman, Conroy, Coonan, Eggleston, Chris Evans, Faulkner, Ferguson, Ferris, Harradine, Harris, Knowles, Lees, Mason, McGauran, Murphy, Nettle, Payne and Watson

Senator Greig for matters relating to the Information Technology portfolio

Senator Ridgeway for matters relating to the Arts portfolio

Senator Nettle for the committee's inquiry on the environmental performance at the Ranger, Jabiluka, Beverley and Honeymoon uranium operations

**Senators in attendance:** Senators Allison, Lundy, Tchen, Tierney and Wong

**Terms of reference for the inquiry:**

To inquire into and report on:

The role of libraries as providers of public information in the online environment, having particular regard to:

- (a) the current community patterns of demand for public information services throughout libraries, including the provision of such information online;
- (b) the response by libraries (public, university, research) to the changing information needs of Australians, including through the provision of online resources;
- (c) possible strategies which would enhance the wider use and distribution of information resources held by libraries, including the establishment of library networks, improved online access in libraries, online libraries, and greater public knowledge and skill in using library resources;
- (d) the use of libraries to deliver information and services over the Internet to more effectively meet community demands for public information in the online environment; and
- (e) the roles of various levels of government, the corporate sector and libraries themselves in ensuring the most effective use of libraries as primary public information resource in the online environment.

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**Committee met at 9.11 a.m.****SCHMIDMAIER, Mrs Dagmar, Secretary, Library Council of New South Wales; State Librarian and Chief Executive, State Library of New South Wales****CONDON, Mr Patrick, Library Manager, City of Sydney**

**CHAIR**—I declare open this public hearing of the Senate Environment, Communications, Information Technology and the Arts References Committee and welcome everyone here today. Today's hearing is the fourth in what is intended to be a comprehensive national program of hearings into two inquiries referred to the committee by the Senate on 25 June 2002 into the role of the libraries in an online environment and into the Australian telecommunications network. The committee intends, as far as practicable, to conduct the two inquiries together, although it will of course present separate reports to the Senate in due course. Its reasons for doing so are basically twofold. Firstly, while the terms of reference are relatively distinct, there is some element of overlap in terms of the need for the committee to examine the proper role of government in the delivery of online services. Secondly, the terms of reference have particular resonance in regional and remote areas and, for pragmatic reasons, the committee wishes to maximise the value of any hearings it undertakes in such areas by combining the evidence collection process. That said by way of general introduction, I now welcome our first witnesses. The committee has your respective submissions before it, which we have already published. Would you like to make any alternations or additions to those documents at this stage?

**Mrs Schmidmaier**—No.

**CHAIR**—The committee prefers all evidence to be given in public but, should you at any stage wish to give your evidence, part of your evidence or answers to specific questions in private, you may ask to do so and the committee will consider your request. I will only say this once for the benefit of all witnesses: witnesses are reminded that the evidence given to the committee is protected by parliamentary privilege. I have been asked by the Senate Privileges Committee to remind you that the giving of false or misleading evidence to the committee may constitute a contempt of the Senate. As you are both officers of the public sector, you will not be expected to answer questions which invite you to express an opinion on matters of policy and you will be given reasonable opportunity to refer questions to superior officers or other responsible individuals. I invite you to make brief opening statements before we move to questions.

**Mrs Schmidmaier**—The Library Council of New South Wales, in discussing this submission, raised one fundamental issue that they would like me to comment on—it underpins the submission—and that is the environment in which libraries work. They work in a cooperative environment and part of the philosophic underpinning of librarianship is to share and cooperate, so a lot of the evidence shows that. However, one of the things that does not exist is the systematic building of infrastructure to allow that cooperation to build on existing networks. That covers both physical infrastructure and electronic infrastructure. I will leave it at that.

**Mr Condon**—In my submission I note five points, one of which is building on Mrs Schmidmaier's comments. The first point I would like to make is that government bodies should make information available in a format that the public can access easily and with minimal

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training. The second point is that the government should publicise widely the fact that public libraries can assist the public to find government information. Thirdly, state and national libraries must establish an open electronic database network linking their electronic resources through one agency, if possible, such as in the way the academic libraries have united. Doing so could assist the public libraries in providing information to the public through one major source, reduce the costs through collaborative bargaining with the database vendors and assist in standardising the electronic book formats. The government should provide for all libraries and branches to be linked to a high-speed network so that all branches in particular can share the information that is often only available through the main library. My final point is that governments should identify one office to which libraries may suggest improvements or criticise the lack of government information and the way it is presented. This will improve the public's access to meaningful information.

**CHAIR**—Can you expand on your last point? Did you say the government should set up an office?

**Mr Condon**—Identify an office. Often what happens is that you do not get adequate information from a government source. If you go to that source you may get moved around or not listened to and it may take a long time, but there could be some area where our problems could be identified, passed on and looked at—like an ombudsman—so that some influence could be played on that government department to ensure that they fit a common format or that they make information available more readily and more accessibly.

**CHAIR**—So it would be a kind of information ombudsman—someone who was not concerned about services per se but who would be critical of the web site and the way in which leaflets were not available or whatever?

**Mr Condon**—Or perhaps even suggest some standards. We are talking long term, perhaps, by the time people change. It is much easier if people go into databases using common formats. It is far less confusing for the public and they can locate meaningful data.

**CHAIR**—What role do you see libraries having in this?

**Mr Condon**—As pointed out in our submission, libraries in particular do a lot of training for the public. No matter how good a government department web page is, there are a lot of people out there who are scared of technology. Libraries can play that role—they can play the role of teaching people how to use it. We can play the role of saying, 'This one isn't very productive. This database is not good.' We can provide that feedback through this office, as I have mentioned.

**CHAIR**—Thank you. I do not think we have had that suggestion thus far in our hearings.

**Senator TIERNEY**—The Library Council of New South Wales has a broader role than the New South Wales State Library. Could you describe the relationship between the state libraries and the libraries around the state—possibly local community libraries?

**Mrs Schmidmaier**—The Library Council of New South Wales, through its act, is responsible for the provision of library services to the people of New South Wales through, firstly, the State Library itself and, secondly, through the provision of grants, subsidy funding and advice to the

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public libraries throughout the state of New South Wales. It is the governing body, if you like, and the State Library itself carries out those functions.

**Senator TIERNEY**—I take it that at the local library level funding is basically council funding. Is that correct?

**Mrs Schmidmaier**—Yes, 90 per cent of the funding is council funding.

**Senator TIERNEY**—How would you describe that sort of funding across the state in support of libraries at the local level?

**Mrs Schmidmaier**—From the local level?

**Senator TIERNEY**—How would you describe the local councils' funding support for libraries at the local level?

**Mrs Schmidmaier**—In New South Wales it is very good. Local council funding for libraries has increased over the past few years and local government see their libraries as a very important part of their service to their community.

**Senator TIERNEY**—Over the last 10 years we have gone through an IT revolution. It has the potential to empower libraries at a local level and to provide access to members of the public who may not be able to afford their own IT equipment. How have the public libraries at the local level kept up with that change in technology?

**Mrs Schmidmaier**—Through a partnership with the State Library. About five years ago, the State Library of New South Wales put in a submission to roll out some electronic infrastructure, which is referred to in our submission as NSW.net. Rolling out that network was funded by the state government, and that is now out in all of the public libraries in New South Wales. However, the sustainable nature of that network in the longer term is something that needs to be addressed.

**Senator TIERNEY**—Is this because they provide money for capital expenditure and not ongoing support?

**Mrs Schmidmaier**—That is correct.

**Senator TIERNEY**—So it was a one-off budget allocation?

**Mrs Schmidmaier**—That is correct.

**Senator TIERNEY**—So who picks it up?

**Mrs Schmidmaier**—Local government will need to pick it up.

**Senator TIERNEY**—I assume it would then mean an expanding budget for libraries in local government for them to do it. Can you give us a sense of how local government funding has

gone over the last 10 years, which is basically the time that we are talking about with this information change?

**Mrs Schmidmaier**—The network is rolled out not simply to libraries; it includes those connections that are of benefit to the council. Part of the philosophy of rolling out the connection is that it is council-wide rather than library-specific. The philosophy behind it is that councils would then pick that up once the initial infrastructure had been rolled out.

**Senator TIERNEY**—Was that done as a tied grant to the council?

**Mrs Schmidmaier**—Yes, it was given to the Library Council for distribution to the local government and library area according to the business plan that was set out.

**Senator TIERNEY**—So that money you gave would have gone directly to the council, not directly to particular libraries within the council area. Is that how it works?

**Mrs Schmidmaier**—Yes, it goes to the council.

**Senator TIERNEY**—But it is tagged to libraries; they have to spend it on libraries.

**Mrs Schmidmaier**—Yes.

**Senator TIERNEY**—On the ground at a particular library, what would they have received that was different from what they had before? What would actually be in the library because of that grant?

**Mrs Schmidmaier**—They would have received at least one terminal. Every library received at least one terminal. The network itself is something that we contracted out. The State Library of New South Wales manage the roll-out of the network, but we have not taken on the role of an ISP. So it is simply rolling out those connections, managed by the State Library, so that there are Internet connections out there in the areas. The negotiation as to how physically that happens out there and how it is connected to the local government computer centre is something that is done on an individual basis. However the library is hooked up needs to fit in with whatever the council already has.

**Senator TIERNEY**—In what year was the initial grant?

**Mrs Schmidmaier**—The initial grant was four years ago.

**Senator TIERNEY**—In 1998?

**Mrs Schmidmaier**—Yes.

**Senator TIERNEY**—Has there been any supplementary funding into that since, or was that just a one-off?

**Mrs Schmidmaier**—Not since then, no.

**Senator TIERNEY**—You mentioned making connections; I take it that not all libraries are connected yet. Could you give us a sense of the percentage that are and how that percentage is increasing over time?

**Mrs Schmidmaier**—There are 100 central public libraries in New South Wales. Each of those 100 have one or more branches attached to them. All of those 100 central libraries are connected. I am not sure of the exact number of branches that are connected, but I could provide you with that information; I could take that on notice.

**Senator TIERNEY**—So the plan is for all the libraries, through the 100 central libraries, to be connected?

**Mrs Schmidmaier**—The plan was for all the central libraries to be connected and then to go as far out into the local communities as possible.

**Senator TIERNEY**—If I went out to a place like Mudgee, what sorts of speeds would the library have on the Internet?

**Mrs Schmidmaier**—I would have to take that on notice; I do not know.

**Senator TIERNEY**—The thing I am trying to get at is that we have some marvellous central resources, particularly through the national cultural institutions. Our hope is that in Mudgee we will perhaps move to a point where you can actually access that. Part of it is obviously going to be governed by the speeds available in the area you are in. Those speeds are of course variable and you cannot go much beyond that, obviously. I suppose my question is: are the local libraries up to the speeds that are available?

**Mrs Schmidmaier**—I guess we are not. One of the issues that we have discovered is that the local telephone exchanges cannot cope with some of the connections that we would like to put in. That is particularly the case in the smaller rural communities where we have been doing some work this year. It is simply not possible to make those connections, because the local exchange cannot handle it. That is something that affects us in the library sector and then goes over into the telecommunications environment, which I guess is your other inquiry. We have found that to be a real difficulty in doing this roll-out. I think it has made us much more aware that other parties need to be involved in order to make this more effective, because, from a library perspective, we really need a telecommunications partner with the same drive and commitment to get that roll-out out there. So the money might be there and the willingness might be there, but the capacity is not there in a telecommunications framework.

**Senator TIERNEY**—In the other hearing yesterday we heard of some marvellous wireless-type technologies that will actually boost that end use, so possibly technology is moving towards it.

**Mrs Schmidmaier**—With respect, we have had a really interesting experience with another program that we are running. It is called Rural Link and is also mentioned in here. It is Commonwealth funded and is used to take the extension out into small communities of less than 2,000 people, where there really is not a lot of infrastructure but where there might be a branch library. It is particularly in those instances where we cannot get the technology to work. We are

using satellite, wireless and a whole combination of things simply because of the difficulty, but it is very difficult.

**Senator TIERNEY**—That is one of the great things about the way it is evolving in the sparser areas. The satellite and the wireless technologies can pick up the sparse areas that the more conventional technologies cannot. How have the budgets for your public library trended in recent years? Is the amount of money that you are getting to distribute across your system static, falling or rising? What is occurring?

**Mrs Schmidmaier**—It has risen slowly but not significantly. Our annual reports show that increase but it has been a modest increase.

**Senator TIERNEY**—What would be the average rise in your total budget per annum in recent years?

**Mrs Schmidmaier**—There have been one-off grants for providing increased access to resources—an extra \$2 million here and there. But, in terms of the actual base funding, there has not been a regular increase in recurrent funding. It has been more like one-off grants that have happened over the last four years or so.

**Senator TIERNEY**—What would be the average rise—one per cent, two per cent?

**Mrs Schmidmaier**—Yes, of that order.

**Senator TIERNEY**—About one per cent?

**Mrs Schmidmaier**—Yes.

**Senator TIERNEY**—So it is not even keeping up with inflation?

**Mrs Schmidmaier**—No.

**Senator TIERNEY**—So in effect, in real terms, it is declining?

**Mrs Schmidmaier**—Yes.

**Senator TIERNEY**—With digitalisation, we have a massive task ahead of us. The National Library explained to the committee the scale of the task ahead. The National Library and a whole lot of other cultural institutions are digitalising collections and they indicated to us that this was reasonably well coordinated across the country between the institutions that are doing that. What is the State Library of New South Wales doing in this area? Where do you put the emphasis on digitalisation and what sort of effort has been put into that in terms of collections?

**Mrs Schmidmaier**—In our submission we addressed that in a number of areas and we have given a number of case studies as examples. Let me take one of those examples: 2010 is the centenary of the Mitchell Library and we have a 10-year program planned. In that program, we have a number of components about preservation, digitisation and making the unique resources of the State Library accessible to the community at large, and we are also doing that through an

exhibition program. The example that we used is our Matthew Flinders project, which began in 2001.

The Flinders archive is digitised and it is on the Web. It is being used in the education sector through the HSC in New South Wales where some assignments have been set, for example in English, to analyse Flinders' letters. In the science area, some of his reports have been used for the students to examine. Part of our objective to make that information more broadly available and relevant today has been a spectacular success in that small area.

Researchers have also accessed the material and we have had a lot of feedback about that. A travelling exhibition which has been around the country has been travelling for two years. That is also a very successful project. However, the digitisation of that collection was funded through private benefaction. The reason for my initial comment about these being interesting initiatives which are very difficult to sustain is that there is no funding for this area of activity. Our focus, on the national scale and with our state and national colleagues, is on the material that is unique to us which will add to the knowledge of Australian history and social life. We contribute to that through a range of national initiatives. However, they are the sorts of things that are very difficult to fund within our current normal budgetary environment.

**Senator TIERNEY**—One of the six recommendations you made is that the Commonwealth government should encourage, financially or otherwise, public libraries to extend their cooperative resource-sharing initiatives. Could you briefly explain what you mean by that and how you would see that working?

**Mrs Schmidmaier**—Which recommendation is that?

**Senator TIERNEY**—It is recommendation No. 4.

**Mrs Schmidmaier**—Recommendation 4 relates specifically to the need to support the notion of a national bibliographic database, which has been a very strong and important piece of infrastructure for libraries in Australia. There has been pressure for it to be more self-sufficient than it has been, from a national perspective. I can only say that, for the benefit of access to Australian information for Australians, it is really important that participation in that national database is not made prohibitive by the costs of putting information in and accessing it. That is a very strong recommendation from the way we look at it and from our relationship with public libraries. If they are telling us that they cannot afford to use Kinetica, that goes against the whole philosophy and rationale for the existence of that national bibliographic database.

**Senator TIERNEY**—I suppose it is always a question of who pays, but, if local government is basically funding local libraries and state governments are running state libraries, why shouldn't it be part of their normal budget process because it is part of accessing information?

**Mrs Schmidmaier**—It is really a matter of deciding how much of that information it is of benefit to provide to the people and what sorts of indexes and access you provide; or do you not make that material available? Libraries are always in a position of making decisions about which information is going to be the most useful and therefore which sources of information you catalogue and index for the benefit of the community. They are matters of judgment. However, it seems to me that a basic record of what is published in this country about life, society and government in this country should be accessible and should not be prohibited.

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**Senator TIERNEY**—So your main concern is not so much about access; it is about creation and addition to the database?

**Mrs Schmidmaier**—That is right. There is a real danger that, if the costs of that are prohibitive, the record will not even be there to access.

**Senator TIERNEY**—On a completely separate line, libraries obviously have surplus books at certain times—for example, when books go out of date. What does the State Library do with them?

**Mrs Schmidmaier**—What do you mean, ‘surplus books’?

**Senator TIERNEY**—I mean books that are out of date. For example, the fifth edition of Samuelson’s *Economics* would be superseded by the sixth edition of Samuelson’s *Economics* and so on. Older books are not used often. I assume that you cull books from time to time, or do you just keep them all?

**Mrs Schmidmaier**—The State Library culls very infrequently, because of its charter. We keep variant editions so that people who are researching can see what has happened over time. So as the State Library we cull very rarely. Part of our charter is to keep a recorded history of thought and publication, and we do that.

**CHAIR**—That is more a question for Mr Condon, probably.

**Senator TIERNEY**—Even with digitalisation processes, you do not see a transfer over time where some things would be just kept digitally? There is a storage question, with the knowledge explosion over time.

**Mrs Schmidmaier**—The big issue with digitalisation is that previously when you purchased material you had it permanently; with a lot of the material you purchase today, if it is in digital format you just buy access to it for a period of time. In the longer term, that is something that we really need to address. Whereas previously we had access to the store of information, now you only buy it in time slots. If you cannot afford to keep buying it over a long time, how do you access it and who pays?

**Senator TIERNEY**—That applies to journals as well. A university might decide to stop subscribing to some particular journals in a physical form.

**Mrs Schmidmaier**—Yes, but somewhere in the country, through the resource-sharing network, there has been one copy—

**Senator TIERNEY**—Yes, there should be one somewhere.

**Mrs Schmidmaier**—whereas I think that, in the new world and when things are born digital, we may not have that one copy in the country.

**Senator TIERNEY**—That is an interesting point. Mr Condon, what do you do with any surplus books when you do a cull?

**Mr Condon**—The people I visit tend to be in a steady state. You can expand your collection only so far. In the end, you have to weed out your collection. We look for the materials that have been least used or not used at all and we remove those, give them away, pulp them or whatever, but the collection in the main stays pretty static. If we need something, we rely on the interlibrary loan system, which is very efficient. We go into Kinetica and locate the item. Often, if it is an academic type one, it is in one of their joint stores or in the State Library.

**Senator TIERNEY**—So in the example that I gave, Samuelson's seventh edition superseding the sixth edition—

**Mr Condon**—Speaking of Samuelson in general, we would not buy it; it is seen as a major text book. Speaking generally—

**Senator TIERNEY**—You know what I mean.

**Mr Condon**—Yes, I know what you mean. We tend not to keep previous editions.

**Senator TIERNEY**—What do you do with them?

**Mr Condon**—We remove them in our weeding process. They either get pulped or given away to Villawood Immigration Detention Centre or the Salvation Army. They often on-sell them to the community.

**Senator TIERNEY**—So nothing actually leaves the country out of New South Wales?

**Mrs Schmidmaier**—Yes, it does. We have sent material, most recently to Bali. There has been quite a program to do that. Previously there was a program to send material to various places in the former Czechoslovakia.

**Senator TIERNEY**—But I take it there is no coordinated, ongoing program; it is a response to situations: 'There is a problem in Timor, so let's send it there.' There is nothing coordinated.

**Mrs Schmidmaier**—No, not like it used to be. It used to be coordinated.

**Senator TIERNEY**—How was it previously?

**Mrs Schmidmaier**—It used to be coordinated through Foreign Affairs and Trade, I think. There was a program whereby libraries could contact that department, which had a series of places—particularly in the Pacific, which is where things were concentrated—and public libraries sent some of their materials to school libraries in those areas.

**Senator TIERNEY**—So it was centrally collected?

**Mrs Schmidmaier**—Through Canberra, yes.

**Senator TIERNEY**—How long ago was that?

**Mrs Schmidmaier**—I think it was in the late seventies, early eighties.

**Senator TIERNEY**—That has not happened for 20 years?

**Mrs Schmidmaier**—Not to my knowledge.

**Senator TIERNEY**—That is something we can chase up. Thank you.

**Senator LUNDY**—I want to go back to the Rural Link program and the difficulties you mentioned about the telecommunications infrastructure in those places. We know from evidence in the other inquiry that a large number of exchanges are incapable of providing any broadband service at all. For the Rural Link program, is there a definition of the bandwidth or a level of bandwidth or broadband that you are seeking in the first instance? Has that been identified as part of that program?

**Mrs Schmidmaier**—Our aim was to provide acceptable access to the Internet, so you need that capacity there. That was sort of the basis so that those areas were not further disadvantaged.

**Senator LUNDY**—Further to that point, we know that some of those exchanges cannot provide any more than 14.4 kilobits per second; for others it is 9.6 kilobits and so forth. How much was the grant to the Rural Link program worth?

**Mrs Schmidmaier**—It was \$4.8 million, I think.

**Senator LUNDY**—Where is it at in terms of its implementation?

**Mrs Schmidmaier**—We are in the process of dealing with some of these technical issues. There have been rollouts at somewhere between 20 and 25 sites, and we are now dealing with a number of other areas where, in fact, we have got these technical problems. There is no point in putting equipment out there if it is not going to work, so we are currently negotiating that with Telstra.

**Senator LUNDY**—In negotiating with Telstra, does part of that \$4.8 million get spent to subsidise Telstra in upgrading their infrastructure?

**Mrs Schmidmaier**—No. There is certainly no money for that; it would be great if there were.

**Senator LUNDY**—A lot of the Networking the Nation grants do have money for Telstra in various ways through the program delivery, so I was just curious. So, really, the success of Rural Link is contingent upon Telstra's cooperation in upgrading those facilities.

**Mrs Schmidmaier**—Absolutely. We are obviously in close contact with our federal counterparts, as well, in the Commonwealth bureaucracy. They know where these things are at, but it is just an issue.

**Senator LUNDY**—Can you give a proportion of the branches of the central public libraries that are affected by those technical barriers?

**Mrs Schmidmaier**—Of the towns that have been selected—I think there were about 50 towns—I suppose half of them would be affected.

**Senator LUNDY**—What is the time frame for Rural Link?

**Mrs Schmidmaier**—The program goes on for another 12 months.

**Senator LUNDY**—Do you anticipate you will have your rollout completed within that time frame?

**Mrs Schmidmaier**—We are working on it; that is all I can say. It really depends on how those negotiations go and whether some sort of lesser connection is going to be acceptable to those towns and to the parties involved. It is a voluntary program; it is not mandatory in any way, so the local council has to agree that it wants to do this and so on. There is a lot of negotiation that is happening there.

**Senator LUNDY**—Will it be the local council that has to pay for an upgraded connection, or do the negotiations involve the suggestion that Telstra actually provide that service?

**Mrs Schmidmaier**—The negotiations are definitely about Telstra providing that.

**Senator LUNDY**—I would like to go to the earlier comments, Mr Condon, about the office of an information ombudsman that Senator Allison alluded to. What are your observations regarding feedback on the standard of information over the last few years, particularly from sources in the federal government? Have you noticed any particular improvement, or do you have any observations about the standard of it?

**Mr Condon**—I am rarely on the reference desk these days, but the observations from my staff are that there is more information available. The Web revolution certainly has improved things, but going into different databases and finding information is difficult. Facilities like Google and so on are much to the benefit of the community. They do find a lot of information but there is a lot of garbage there. What we need to do, if we can, is to go into particular databases and find information quickly rather than rely on things like Google, which do not always get you the best information.

**Senator LUNDY**—They get lots of other things as well. In terms of the fed.gov.au domain name, which is where most of the federal government information is stored, do you have any observations about the search engine attached to fed.gov.au?

**Mr Condon**—I am afraid I could not comment on that.

**Senator LUNDY**—I noticed a reference—I think in your submission—to the ability of staff to manage the ever increasing demands of users of libraries because their technological skills do not match what is required.

**Mr Condon**—Yes.

**Senator LUNDY**—I suspect part of that relates to the search capability, which is quite a specialised skill on the Net. What sort of human resources are required to keep pace with user demand on the higher technology and Internet access services that you provide? I am very happy for Mrs Schmidmaier to answer that question as well.

**Mr Condon**—My background is in academic libraries, so I have brought into the public library area a number of the facilities that we used there. The City of Sydney Library has 10 professionals, and we have divided up subject allocations among the professionals according to their interests and degrees. That allows them to select the best materials for the library and to also work on the databases, wherever they might be, that relate to them. Once a week they teach each other, in a one-hour session, about what they are doing in SPORT or what other databases they have found. We find that that is the best way to increase their knowledge and the best way to use them instead of having just one specialist, which means someone does not get an answer when that person is not on duty. Further down the track, with our development for Customs House, one of our proposals is that that central pool of professionals will be able to assist the branches more effectively if we have effective communication. If the branch librarian is unable, through the training process, to provide that information, we could perhaps go to a videoconference with the customer at that site talking directly to the subject specialists at another site and very quickly—hopefully—provide the best accurate information that can be found.

**Senator LUNDY**—Mrs Schmidmaier, do you have any comments in relation to that?

**Mrs Schmidmaier**—Perhaps I could make a couple of brief comments. I am sure you are aware that in New South Wales there was recently an award case which recognised the increased skills and knowledge required of librarians. That was colloquially referred to as the pay equity case. Part of that was an acknowledgment of the increased knowledge and skill base required to provide services in the information age, both in the creation of databases and accessing those databases. It is a challenge for all libraries. The state and national libraries have been discussing this issue and how to provide training for the future, particularly as a lot of the university library schools and so on have morphed into other areas and have lost a pre-eminent position. They have become part of another disciplinary area. That is a challenge for us in terms of how to ensure that the skill base is there. Another initiative of the state and national libraries is the AskNow reference service, which we are sharing. Irrespective of where you ring from in Australia, you might get, for example, the Victorian State Library answering. That pilot program is based on the concept of 24/7 service and questions are answered by a professional. With the time differences across Australia, it is providing some interesting information for us.

**Senator LUNDY**—We heard a little about that yesterday.

**Mrs Schmidmaier**—It is very interesting and it raises certain issues. People are now finding things on the Internet and they come to libraries after they have gone a certain way and they cannot get any further. In the research that we are doing, we are finding that the questions we are being asked are more complex. That is a change and it requires more internal training within the State Library in order to provide answers to those questions. It is an interesting area.

**Senator LUNDY**—Do you have enough resources to do that?

**Mrs Schmidmaier**—You never have enough resources. No, we do not but, with all of these things, we have decided that this is a priority, so as part of our quality program we are reviewing where we are at and trying to shift resources across to provide this training aspect, because that is our front line and if we are not there at the pointy end it is a real indictment of our service.

**Senator TCHEN**—I was looking through your written submission. You obviously provide a fair bit of service in terms of online access but it is to a specific database. Do you provide free searches? You mentioned people searching on Google. Do you provide such a service?

**Mr Condon**—We provide a service for Google. General Internet services are \$2 an hour. We have free searching through the subject specialists, through the library staff and the help desk, and we provide free access to about 25 electronic databases that we have purchased for the general public.

**Mrs Schmidmaier**—At the State Library, Internet access is free. We do not allow access in the reading rooms to Hotmail and those sorts of things; we have a terminal in the cafe where you can access that type of information. We were finding that backpacker hostels were putting up signs saying, ‘Go to the State Library to do your Hotmail.’ Our focus is on providing information access as opposed to a postal service. That seems to have settled down now. The Library Council has endorsed a paper which supports the provision of basic, free access to information through the Internet.

**Senator TCHEN**—The reason I asked is that it seemed to me that the public library system offers tremendous potential in helping the community to overcome the digital divide, particularly where it is not geographically but socioeconomically based. Obviously not everyone can afford up-to-date online computer services at home. Public libraries are a potential resource in that regard. In your written submission you mentioned that and I wanted to check it. What about your costs of providing that sort of access? Do you get special support, special deals or library rates from providers such as Telstra?

**Mr Condon**—No. Our IT system is being upgraded at the moment. Through our central library we go through council’s provider. Outside we have gone off to i.primus, which is much cheaper than the others and we can keep our costs down. All our equipment has been provided by council through its normal grants and its plant and asset funds.

**Senator TCHEN**—The committee heard evidence in Melbourne from public library providers. One of the problems they face is the cost of obtaining online access.

**Mr Condon**—We were with BigPond and we suddenly found ourselves with a bill of about \$12,000 in one year, because it jumped over the level of the agreement. We also had a hacker or a trojan in on the system. We changed to another vendor who did not care and charged us about \$200 a year for the modem connection, which was much cheaper, and we are now running a very effective service.

**CHAIR**—Do you share that knowledge around with other libraries?

**Mr Condon**—It is pretty common knowledge. You just have to ring around to get your rates. Telstra were not concerned about the trojan that was placed on some of our computers.

**Senator LUNDY**—So you had to pay the bill?

**Mr Condon**—Yes. In fact, we had advised Telstra by phone that we wished to discontinue their service. They continued it until we faxed them and that cost us a few more thousand dollars.

**Senator LUNDY**—Did Telstra approach either of you in relation to your submission to this inquiry?

**Mr Condon**—I have not made our submission public. Perhaps you have but I have not.

**Senator TCHEN**—At the risk of annoying the chair by taking up too much time, I would like to ask Mr Condon to tell the committee of his experience with the use of BigPond. I think it is worth while putting it on record.

**Mr Condon**—That was the only experience we had. We bought a package. You have to say how much use you are going to make of it and initially when we went into it that worked. Then when the trojan was placed on our computer we kept changing passwords. But the IT student or whoever it was who had put it on the system made access through our system to BigPond free for their colleagues. We seemed to get no help from BigPond to resolve that. We had to sort it out. We had to find out about it ourselves and track it down. When we went to a different provider that provider said, ‘We’re aware of it. We’ve tracked down where that person is, but because of privacy we can’t give you that number.’ They were not concerned that the use could have trebled. We were still paying one very basic rate. As far as I was concerned, that was their issue rather than mine.

**CHAIR**—So your trojan is still on board?

**Mr Condon**—We kept changing the passwords. It seemed that someone had come in and set up something in the system that could track when a new password went in. So we changed the password every day and finally the person went away. I do not know what technology they came up with but it was a bit frightening, because we had to send a reasonably senior person over all the time to our branch library, which is open on weekends and later at night. People could get in there without any supervision. Whatever they did, they certainly worked the system.

**Senator TCHEN**—Your current providers actually helped you to track down the person?

**Mr Condon**—They could work out what telephone number this was being transferred onto but they would only give us the first four digits. I think the access was from Wiley Park. I do not know what they did to pursue that.

**Senator TCHEN**—But they did not ask you to pay for the extra?

**Mr Condon**—No, we have a \$200 fee or whatever it is per year no matter how much we use. We have unlimited use.

**Senator TCHEN**—But BigPond charged you the amount, regardless?

**Mr Condon**—BigPond did. The major issue I had with BigPond was that we rang them and we told them we were cancelling their service and they did nothing until we sent them a fax. We certainly continued to get the bills on a monthly basis when we thought it had been cancelled. Meanwhile down the track we were some thousands of dollars up. We rang them and they said, 'We've no record of that,' so we faxed them straightaway and then it stopped.

**Senator TCHEN**—Obviously they do not trust telecommunication! Mrs Schmidmaier, you said that funding for libraries had increased but increased at a fairly low rate.

**Mrs Schmidmaier**—Do you mean funding for the State Library of New South Wales?

**Senator TCHEN**—No, for the library system. I am asking you this in your capacity as Secretary of the Library Council of New South Wales.

**Mrs Schmidmaier**—The funding comes in two areas: one for the public library network, which is the grants—

**Senator TCHEN**—I am more interested in the public library network.

**Mrs Schmidmaier**—There has been special grant funding which has come through that, particularly for resources. The major additional money was the \$8 million for the rolling out of NSW.net.

**Senator TCHEN**—That is from the state?

**Mrs Schmidmaier**—That is from the state, yes. It is all state money.

**Senator TCHEN**—We heard from Victoria that the Victorian public libraries were formerly funded about 50-50 between state and local government. Over time it has shifted to something like 25-75 between state and local government. Is there the same trend in New South Wales?

**Mrs Schmidmaier**—I do not think it has ever been 50-50 funding in New South Wales.

**Senator TCHEN**—What is the proportion?

**Mrs Schmidmaier**—The current proportion is about 90-10.

**Senator TCHEN**—Is that 90 per cent from local government?

**Mrs Schmidmaier**—Yes.

**Senator TCHEN**—Is that recurrent funding or all funding?

**Mrs Schmidmaier**—That is the recurrent funding.

**CHAIR**—I think we need to stop there, Senator Tchen. Mrs Schmidmaier, there are lots more questions we could have asked you and we probably should have scheduled twice as much time to hear from you. Can I also say that my colleagues and I have been very impressed by the work

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that libraries have been doing in this online area. In fact, we have been surprised as well as impressed. Thank you very much for appearing today. By the way, if there is anything else you wish to tell the committee at a later stage which you may have forgotten today, please feel free to do that.

**Senator LUNDY**—On that point, I would be particularly interested in the experience with Telstra generally in relation to connectivity, costs and service. We would like more information about that if you have it.

**Mrs Schmidmaier**—We do have that.

**CHAIR**—Excellent. Thank you.

[10.01 a.m.]

**McPHERSON, Ms Madeleine, President, Council of Australian University Libraries**

**SCHMIDT, Mrs Janine Betty, University Librarian, Australian Subject Gateways Forum**

**THORSEN, Ms Barbara, WebLaw Coordinator, Australian Subject Gateways Forum**

**CHAIR**—Welcome. The committee has before it your respective submissions, which we have already published. Are there any alterations or additions to those documents that you want to make at this stage?

**Ms McPherson**—I might comment on them and make some points about them, but there are no additions.

**CHAIR**—The committee prefers all evidence to be given in public but, should you at any stage wish to give your evidence, part of your evidence or answers to specific questions in private, you may ask to do so and the committee will consider your request. I now invite Ms McPherson to make an opening statement and then we will go to each of you before proceeding to questions.

**Ms McPherson**—I was glad to hear your closing comment in the last session that you were impressed, because I think libraries are highly innovative organisations—at least those that are reasonably well funded, particularly in Australia. We have been very proactive in responding to the impact of online technologies. If you go back at least 10 years, you may remember that the Internet was actually developed in universities in the US and arrived in university libraries first. Those technologies have certainly transformed our libraries and they will in time transform other libraries, but the rate at which they are transformed will depend on the resources that are made available and the extent to which there is the will for social policies to enable general access for the community to the technologies.

Our submission is not comprehensive because others have made comprehensive submissions on other matters, but I think it attempts to be realistic in terms of the fairly complex legislative framework within which a Commonwealth initiative might address these issues, if you accept that public libraries are the most suitable venue to affect the whole Australian community. If you look at funding as if it is an irrigation system, Canberra sits at the centre, the public libraries are at the narrow end of the pipe and there are a number of taps between the centre and the public libraries. We have tried to suggest some options which are open to the federal government and within its jurisdiction which would assist. I do not need to emphasise this because the previous witness stressed the importance of the basic telecommunications infrastructure, which is where the Commonwealth can act.

In addition to that, our submission suggests that the federal government could take the initiative in setting standards for provision to all Australians, wherever they may be, and that would impact on the telecommunications policy. That would involve the capacity of that telecommunications network and the standards of information provision that any Australian

might reasonably expect to have access to. In that area, we suggest that the federal government may be able to act quite easily.

The other matter which concerns us and which particularly concerns university libraries is copyright. The Copyright Act is under review at the moment, but we are concerned that the doctrines of fair use and use by scholarship are maintained in any continuation of that legislation. We make a particular suggestion about copyright as it concerns the product of Australian research. We describe briefly in our submission what has happened to those very essential resources for research, which are the scholarly journals, and the impact of changes in the industry on the prices of those journals. My colleague from the University of Queensland would feel just as strongly about this as I do. It is becoming more and more difficult for us to purchase these journals to a level of adequacy to serve our users. There is not a great deal that we can do in the short term about that but, in terms of the national interest, it is within the power of the Commonwealth research agencies to have policies which would mandate that any publications resulting from research grants should not be locked away by the alienation of copyright to the results of that research.

The Association for the Advancement of Science in the US has suggested that the federal government should mandate that people who publish as a result of federally funded research should retain copyright in their own articles instead of signing them away to commercial publishers. That could be done simply in Australia and it would at least retain for Australians access to research which has been publicly funded. Those are the three matters I wanted to emphasise in our submission.

**Ms Thorsen**—As we all know, the Internet is the fastest growing medium today. Search engines, such as Google, claim to index over three billion pages. They are reasonably sophisticated in their search mechanisms. However, an average information seeker is generally not. The most common way of searching would be by using key words. If you are looking for information, for example on Australian literature, if you just search for the key words ‘Australian literature’ in Google you are going to end up with about 750,000 results. That is one problem. Quite often those results are going to be of questionable quality. There will be some good stuff, but a lot of it will be of questionable quality.

Another problem is what is called the deep Web. Not many people—or information seekers—realise that there are two versions of the Web. There is the surface Web, which finds your average webpages, and there is the deep Web, which is information or web sites generated dynamically, which an average search engine such as Google simply cannot see. That information will not be found by normal search engines. It is estimated that that information is about 400 to 500 times larger than what Google can see.

**Senator TIERNEY**—Did you say Google?

**Ms Thorsen**—Yes, it claims to be the biggest search engine. We are dealing with this abundance of information but, as we all know, it does not equate to effective access to knowledge or to relevant knowledge in particular. That is where Australian subject gateways come in. The objective of subject gateways is to assist information seekers to make sense of this abundance of information. Subject gateways evaluate, identify, collect, describe and then make available resources that are considered to be of high quality and key resources in particular subject areas. The approach is very much to subjects. They are put together by information

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specialists. People consciously look for the sorts of things that may be considered key resources in a particular subject area.

Subject gateways that are part of the Australian Subject Gateways Forum concentrate on Australian content as well—they do not duplicate any existing resources—and then provide local knowledge. They are free, generally speaking, to all users, with the exception of AustLit, which is partly subscription based. They are organised in a distributed fashion, if you like, which promotes interinstitutional cooperation as well, which is quite important. They are generally hosted by trusted information providers. In most cases academic libraries are the hosts of gateways, but they are a substantial cost to the institutions. However, it is very important that institutional support is maintained.

The Australian Subject Gateways Forum is a voluntary organisation. It gets no funding at all, nor do the gateways on any ongoing basis. Most gateways originated by obtaining a grant—usually an Australian Research Council grant—as well as some contributions from the partner institutions, but there is no ongoing funding. The forum plays a very important role because it devises quality assurance processes and advises new gateways on technical or business issues, for example. It builds community awareness of the gateways, which are a very important part of information discovery. It works towards federated services to support a national information infrastructure. However, there are a lot of questions to do with that issue. I will hand it over to my colleague to explain.

**Mrs Schmidt**—In a sense, the question is: where do we go from here? The gateways have been extremely successful. To date they take a subject-specific approach. The content is different in law from Australian literature, which emphasises primary biography and bibliography as opposed to actually tracking the law. I am thinking about where we go. The sustainability of the gateways has become quite an issue.

Kinetica, which was discussed previously, has a very narrow technological underpinning at the moment. It is also not free for use, which has also been referred to. I suppose I would put a plug for free use of Kinetica. Kinetica is very rare; there are not many like it in the entire world, providing access to all of the primary library holdings in Australia. The Canadians have a similar national bibliographic database which is available free to all Canadians to use. Kinetica could be developed. What would concern many of us is thinking of online resources being isolated from print. Most of us are trying to combine access to both; otherwise we are throwing away a good deal of our heritage. You have probably already heard that it will take us years—centuries—to get it digitised. And why would we, for some of it? Kinetica could bring the two together.

There are new developments associated with the semantic web. The gateways have been successful so far because we have Australian Research Council funding and we are still not clear on the best techniques to use to integrate appropriate access so that we get all of the Internet access as well as print resources, particularly our own cultural heritage.

There are a couple of other groups looking at these issues at the moment that should be brought into your reflections. One of them is the national collections working forum, which is under this department. I am on that forum, so I am aware of some of its interests. It looks at museums, libraries, galleries and everything in an overarching framework. There is the DEST work, of course, with the National Information Infrastructure. I am sure somebody has

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mentioned that already and there are some submissions in relation to gateways there. It is how we coordinate some of this in the bigger picture that is also of concern.

**Senator TIERNEY**—Mrs Schmidt, you were saying that in the case of Kinetica it should be free. Of course, nothing is ever free; it is a question of exactly who is paying. I just wonder why people who use a service should not make some contribution to it.

**Ms McPherson**—The point about Kinetica is that it is one of those things where the whole is much more valuable than the part. The whole as a public good has a value which is greater than probably the value any library would put on it if they were only looking at their own use. Because everybody contributes there is a value to the whole which would not be the sum of what each library would put on its own access to the cooperative resource.

**Senator TIERNEY**—The whole do not all use Kinetica either. Specific people use Kinetica who have a particular use. My question was: why shouldn't there be some contribution to it, as they get a personal benefit?

**Ms McPherson**—I am not suggesting there should be no contribution.

**Senator TIERNEY**—No, but that is what was suggested. It was suggested it should be free and that is what I was exploring.

**Mrs Schmidt**—Somebody does pay for everything, I agree, and at my university we do not charge anyone to use Kinetica. We pay for that access and so it is probably up to each individual library in the way they translate the costs to its users. I am interested that Canada regards the matter differently from Australia and we do various things that are quite similar. I suppose I look at it from the digital divide as well. If I happened to live in Broken Hill and I walked into my public library, I could access the catalogue there for nothing. No-one charges me to access the catalogue. That has been something that has always happened for as long as everybody can remember. The minute the item I want is not in that library and I check at some other holdings for that, which would be Kinetica, a charge is made. I suppose I am looking at it from the user perspective and that is where the digital divide—

**Senator TIERNEY**—Would you call it a prohibitive charge, though?

**Mrs Schmidt**—I am not sure how much it comes down to each time you use it. I look at our annual bills. I just think it prohibits people from accessing it.

**Senator TIERNEY**—Ms Thorsen, I was fascinated by what you were saying about the deep Web. You seem to be indicating that search engines only access about 1/400th of the information. Is that what you said? We are looking at a quarter of one per cent—would that be reasonable? It would mean that 99.75 per cent is not accessed.

**Ms Thorsen**—By your average search engine—that is right.

**Senator TIERNEY**—I assume the gateway has been set up to try and do something about that. Could you describe in your work how you actually develop mechanisms to create that link to the deeper Web?

**Ms Thorsen**—Resources that go into gateways are created by subject specialists. Apart from having the actual knowledge of the subject, they also have very good networks. Generally speaking, they know what is being done and there are ways of accessing that information if you know how to do it. From a gateway, from a web site if you like, you can link to some of the knowledge that is not found by search engines. You can simply put in a hyperlink, which reads ‘such and such a document’, and the user can click on it and access that information, which may well be something that is generated dynamically but it is primarily the subject knowledge that allows it to happen.

**Senator TIERNEY**—So you are working across a very broad field. How do you create those links across a very broad field?

**Ms Thorsen**—That is where the subject approach comes into it.

**Senator TIERNEY**—With your time resources, how do you prioritise that?

**Ms Thorsen**—For example, in the case of WebLaw, which is a legal gateway, we have 22 institutions involved. Each institution takes responsibility for one particular part of the legal sphere. One institution may take on constitutional law, for example, and subject specialists from that institution will concentrate only on Australian constitutional law and collect resources in that area.

**Senator TIERNEY**—So you are coordinating and encouraging others to build the link rather than doing it yourself.

**Ms Thorsen**—That is right. It is very much a cooperative way of working.

**Senator TIERNEY**—You mention in your submission the UK Resource Discovery Network as a model that we could adopt in Australia. For the *Hansard* record, could you just briefly describe that and why you think we should adopt a similar approach in Australia?

**Ms Thorsen**—We simply think that there should be some sort of coordinating agency that would play a similar role. We are not saying that the technical way that the Resource Discovery Network works is necessarily the best way to go. We are saying that the Resource Discovery Network is a very successful model for being able to search across subject gateways.

The way things are at the moment you can only search a single gateway at a time. As we all know, there is a lot of interdisciplinary research going on and people really need to be able to search across the gateways. That is what the Resource Discovery Network does in the UK. It is very successful because it is funded on an ongoing basis by the Joint Information Systems Committee on an annual basis. They play a coordinating role that allows researchers to search across disciplines. We would like to take it a little bit further. Some of the discussions we have had within the Australian Subject Gateways Forum have been on extending that to other resources—not just gateways but also incorporating other resources and sources of knowledge.

**Senator TIERNEY**—Various countries have attempted to create national information policies with varying degrees of success. I have had a look at some of those in other countries. I would just like your ideas on what we should do in Australia in relation to a national information policy and how it would assist your work if we had one.

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**Mrs Schmidt**—I looked at them as well and I am intrigued by Singapore and the UK. I think they are two models that seem to have worked well there. Whether or not they would work well here is hard to know. In Singapore in particular they are very single-minded and dedicated about it. There are very clear strategies and money behind it, and that is what would be required. It is the same in the UK.

**Ms McPherson**—It is the past failure in Australia to develop a national information policy which perhaps prompted some of our conservatism in our submission. There have been proposals for a national information policy going back decades. It has never happened, partly because of the jurisdictional complications.

**Senator TIERNEY**—Similarly in the United Kingdom. I have had a hard look at that one—I have been over there and looked at it. There are a lot of fine words and documents but I do not think it is working particularly well. In Germany I think it is working a lot better. Of course in Singapore it works very well. But we are a slightly larger island state than they are.

**Ms McPherson**—But you should not take European rhetoric for reality either. I spent a year in the EU and there were fine words and there were many millions of euros spent to not great effect.

**Senator TIERNEY**—The changes in Germany are quite recent—in the last two years. Under the new government they have made a very definite push for it. Across Europe it is another story, of course. Ms McPherson, in relation to some of the challenges, you have talked about usability and the skills of the user. One would have thought that in a university environment it is probably much higher than everywhere else. So what do you see as the particular challenge there in terms of user skill—I-literacy and so on?

**Ms McPherson**—In the universities?

**Senator TIERNEY**—Yes.

**Ms McPherson**—In the universities particularly, there is the pace of change of the technology. If I can take a single example, there is a piece of software called Endnote, which academics and postgraduate students particularly use. They use it to organise their bibliographies and to download and incorporate records from various databases. I think Endnote puts out a new version every year and we have to retrain our academics because every year there is a new functionality. It is a constant challenge to keep up with the changes as the technology develops. All of those developments are for the good and hopefully they lead towards a situation where access to information is much easier and more intuitive.

You would understand that librarians have a grave concern about the quality of information that people use and what we can deliver to them. Despite the training we do in skills and information literacy with students, a number of recent research studies show that students nevertheless prefer Google because it is easy and uses only a few keystrokes. The fact that—and I have seen this figure—only nine per cent of journals are available in the public Internet fazes them less than the fact that they seem to get a lot of returns for a few keystrokes. That is a constant battle. The more that we can do through things like subject gateways and the development of customised interfaces, which deliver an information environment particular to their discipline or their department or to their needs at the moment, the more we are able to

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close that gap. It is not just a matter of increasing their skills; it is also a matter of decreasing the skills that they need to access the information. That is very challenging.

**Senator TIERNEY**—When the 10th edition of Samuelson's *Economics* comes out, what do you do with the eighth and seventh editions?

**Ms McPherson**—I will speak for my own institution, which is a relatively small regional institution. We do not have a large legacy collection and I have said, perhaps cavalierly, that we will never have one. Therefore we do weed and we do have a steady state collection.

**Senator TIERNEY**—What do you do with the books then?

**Ms McPherson**—We give them to Lifeline or sometimes sell them, although we have not done a major weed recently. Nevertheless, I would keep all editions of Samuelson and most of the major textbooks because you never know when you will have a researcher turning up who wants to study the history of the discipline.

**Senator TIERNEY**—You are kidding! Speaking as an economics graduate, you should get rid of them!

**Mrs Schmidt**—The University of Queensland is the de facto store for the state of Queensland. We are the largest library in the state. We would keep one copy of the older edition. We usually find that the others have worn out so we throw them out. Those that are in a state fit for sale are sold through a book sale that is run by the alumni of the university. I will add a plea for the restoration of the scheme which used to operate by which we sent unwanted materials overseas. In my memory, it stopped about eight years ago. Several of us wrote—

**Senator TIERNEY**—We heard earlier that it was 1982.

**Mrs Schmidt**—No, it was about eight years ago.

**Senator TIERNEY**—That is useful to know.

**Mrs Schmidt**—It was a wonderful scheme and we made lists. At the moment, for instance, there is a problem about sending material to Timor because Timor does not want it. I will put in a plea for that scheme. I will also make a comment on the wireless matter that I heard earlier. Wireless is still in a very early stage. We have one campus entirely wireless, and it has not worked all that well. There are three standards, and until the three standards are a bit more settled we would be very nervous about going too far.

**Senator TIERNEY**—Which campus is this?

**Mrs Schmidt**—It is Ipswich campus. In addition to that, as far as libraries are concerned it is quite expensive to install. You need quite a lot of the stations because it has been found that there is a high water content in books. I know it seems ridiculous. There are some warnings for that system.

**Senator TIERNEY**—You said you gave the books to Lifeline. Are you based in Queensland?

**Ms McPherson**—Yes. I am at Toowoomba on the Darling Downs.

**Senator TIERNEY**—They ship them off in container loads.

**Ms McPherson**—No, it is nothing like that. Do not get too alarmed.

**Senator TIERNEY**—No, they do. I have seen the operation of Lifeline.

**Senator LUNDY**—Having read the submissions, I want to move to the operation of the Broadcasting Services Amendment (Online Services) Act. The submission identifies the difficulty you have in technically complying with that legislation. I presume this is because universities choose not to put in place filters on their Internet access. You have mentioned that the Vice-Chancellors Association has had negotiations with the department and with the regulatory authority which, I presume, is the ABA. Can you give any additional information other than what you have in your submission?

**Ms McPherson**—No, I cannot. As far as I know that is where it rests. It is really the responsibility of the directors of information technology services in universities, rather than of librarians. I think the position is actually, ‘Don’t ask, don’t tell.’ If universities were to adopt the technologies that would allow us to filter only for under-18-year-olds, it would be extremely expensive, if not impossible, given that students change passwords and exchange passwords and that sort of thing. It would be inoperable in a university environment.

**Senator LUNDY**—Thank you. I would like to hear Mrs Schmidt’s comments

**Mrs Schmidt**—University libraries provide access to the general public. All of us, while we have restricted licences which might prevent dial-up use, do provide walk-in use. That is where the broadcasting legislation does create issues for us. However, we take very seriously our services to the general public. All universities would do so and we have a huge amount of use. Most of us have websites which are also accessible to the general public. Ours was used by 20 million pages last year and that would be typical.

**CHAIR**—This may not be evident, because you cannot track the people who access your websites, but would it be fair to argue that libraries no longer serve their set constituents in that they are now available to a much broader and even worldwide user group? If I can again put words into your mouth, this might be another reason why the Commonwealth ought to take more interest in the question of funding that availability.

**Mrs Schmidt**—We do measure it and we know where the users are coming from.

**CHAIR**—Can you tell us?

**Mrs Schmidt**—They are coming from countries all over the world. We have had 340,000 PCs use us so far this year. We know that we have 30,000 students, so it speaks for itself.

**CHAIR**—That is very interesting. Is that your experience too, Ms McPherson?

**Ms McPherson**—Yes, exactly. But that is partly due to the operation of things like Google. It does not mean that 340,000 people are thinking, ‘I must go to the University of Queensland.’ It is partly the operation of search engines.

**CHAIR**—But, nonetheless, having been there those users would no doubt come again.

**Ms McPherson**—But they would then have to click on the link to the university.

**Mrs Schmidt**—Most of our 5,500 pages are not accessible via Google.

**Ms McPherson**—There is also the point that was made in our submission, which is that we cannot give access to all of our resources because so many of them are acquired under licence provisions which restrict access. Once upon a time our whole collection was available to the public if they walked in. Now, while there is the conception that online technologies are extending the possibility of walking in by simply going to your PC wherever you are, there is much that libraries are buying these days which is not accessible because of the licence provisions.

**CHAIR**—Are the parameters understood now? Is it clear to you which you can make available and which you cannot?

**Ms McPherson**—We understand, but sometimes the public does not.

**CHAIR**—How is that defined?

**Ms McPherson**—Do you mean: how is access defined?

**CHAIR**—Yes, are you clear on that?

**Ms McPherson**—Yes. We sign a separate licence every time we pay a subscription. The terms of that licence are agreed. We generally require that those licences that have no regard to our conditions be modified as they are often written by lawyers in the United States or elsewhere overseas. Yes, we understand the terms of those licences.

**CHAIR**—Would these documents and publications be subject to the ELR?

**Ms McPherson**—No. They are not if you are talking about Copyright Agency Ltd, because the terms of the contract override the provisions of the copyright law under which CAL operates. For example, one of the things that we insist upon, or try to insist upon if we can, is that we can make full-text journal articles available from the databases for the purposes of teaching—that is, for distribution. We are a large, off-campus university—three-quarters of our students are off campus—so this matters particularly to us. Therefore, we do not pay Copyright Agency Ltd for distributing those articles online to our students, because we are already paying through the licence.

**CHAIR**—Thank you very much for your submissions and for appearing today. I am sorry we have kept you longer than scheduled but it has been most interesting for us.

[10.37 a.m.]

**WALLACE, Ms Meredith Maureen, Secretary, Metropolitan Public Libraries Association**

**CARLAND, Councillor Craig Anthony, Chairperson, Shorelink Library Network**

**SUTHERLAND, Ms Helen Elizabeth, Secretary, Shorelink Library Network**

**CHAIR**—My apologies first of all for keeping you waiting so long. As you can see, we never give ourselves enough time to ask all the interesting questions we would like. The committee has your respective submissions before it, which it has already published. Are there any alterations or additions you wish to make to those documents at this stage?

**Ms Wallace**—I would like to make a couple of introductory remarks.

**CHAIR**—We will come to those. The committee prefers all evidence to be given in public but should you at any stage wish to give all or part of your evidence, or answers to specific questions, in private you may ask to do so and the committee will consider your request. As you are a public officer, Ms Sutherland, you will not be expected to answer questions which invite you to express an opinion on matters of policy, and you will be given a reasonable opportunity to refer questions to a superior officer. Ms Wallace, I do not know whether that applies to you as well.

**Ms Wallace**—It does.

**CHAIR**—Okay, it will apply as read. I now invite Councillor Carland to make an opening statement and then we will go to the others and to questions.

**Councillor Carland**—Shorelink is a cooperative library network servicing five member councils on the lower North Shore of Sydney. It was founded just on 20 years ago—in fact it is only a few months shy of its 20th birthday—and I think it is widely recognised as an outstanding example of local government cooperation. One of the key points we sought to make in our submission was the changing pattern of demand for information services. We are seeing an increasing use of the Web to search our library catalogues. In fact, Shorelink's most recent issue has been to put the catalogues of all its member libraries onto the Web and now our residents can search from their homes. The use of community information databases is increasing rapidly, and the libraries are evolving into a general access point for information on community issues covering planning and development, recycling and the environment. But those changes are in addition to a continuing healthy growth in our traditionally based lending activities.

How have the libraries been responding to those changing needs, including the growth of online needs? Shorelink has been creating the required infrastructure for our councils and in that regard I think it is a very good example of cooperative resourcing, because IT is an area where scale is important. It is providing high-speed public Internet network access to our residents and, notwithstanding the rapid growth of domestic Internet access, there is still a significant

proportion of households that do not have Internet access. As governments push things online, those residents need to go somewhere, and they go to their libraries as their first port of call.

We are seeking increasingly to provide one-shop access to our residents in terms of our catalogues, community information and web resources generally. We are also seeking to trial some innovative approaches. Shorelink was successful in obtaining a grant from the State Librarian of New South Wales to trial e-books, which is an attempt by the library to provide improved services to people who are shut in. E-books are also an alternative to large-print collections, which are an expensive and difficult to maintain aspect of library catalogues.

Then we looked at what is emerging as the needs of libraries. Firstly, we have to fund the increased external access to databases that our residents need. What we are seeing is a growth in the number of residents wanting to use them, and increasingly they are seeking richer content. What is on the Web is moving from simple text based materials to images and streaming media; the bandwidth that is needed is increasing very rapidly.

How do we resource that access to online information? That is practical stuff. We need floor space for terminals. We need hardware, software and capable staff to manage them. That requires, in turn, that libraries look at multiskilling their staff. Increasingly, the residents are expecting their library staff to have a very broad range of technical knowledge. A simple example would be that the Australian Taxation Office now permits taxpayers to lodge their returns online. Residents turn up at their library, log on to the ATO site, start the process and, if they hit a problem putting their tax return together, they look over their shoulder and expect a library staff member to be able to help them.

**CHAIR**—To be a tax expert.

**Councillor Carland**—That is a good example. They may be looking for a mix of tax expertise and technical expertise from those library staff members. We are seeing a much greater broadening of skills required in librarians, and I noticed that that was referred to in the previous submissions.

Where are the libraries going in terms of their future role? It seems evident that they are the natural gateways that the community looks to use. They are seen as safe, trustworthy and as having a bit of expertise that can be built upon. I think libraries are quite willing to step up to the plate, but you need a heavy bat and bats require funding. The State Librarian made a comment about local government funding for libraries being very good. With respect, it has to be, because state government funding has been going backwards. Regrettably, it has been falling at a fairly steady clip of about one per cent a year for the last decade—down from about 20 per cent to about nine per cent in New South Wales, and New South Wales has historically been on the low side of the national scale. I think you would have heard from Victorian librarians that they have slipped from one-half to a quarter. We are down from 20 per cent to nine per cent.

Libraries are willing to take on these additional demands, but they do need the funding to improve their staff expertise, to provide better physical facilities and more terminal space. Privacy is now an issue with so many people wanting to do personal business online using library facilities. Libraries need to do these things alongside servicing the continuing interest in their traditional activities.

**Ms Wallace**—Firstly, I would support everything that Councillor Carland has said.

**CHAIR**—You do not need to say it again.

**Ms Wallace**—I will be brief. The organisation that I am representing today is the Metropolitan Public Libraries Association. It has 43 member councils and well in excess of two million customers. If you come into any of our libraries on a day, you will find students researching and writing assignments; job seekers writing and emailing resumes and job searching; and people reading online news sources in their first community language. We have seniors; we have relationships with organisations like Computer Pals whereby our seniors are doing their self-paced, non-threatening learning and catching up with their grandchildren in terms of technology literacy.

We are a source of information for those who are both time rich and have the leisure to come and use our services, and for those who are time poor and want us to provide things accurately and quickly for them. One of the difficulties for public libraries is that we try to do all things for all people, and that can, in some instances, spread us a little thinly. I have identified, from the MPLA's perspective, five of the key roles that we play in the online environment.

We are authors, first and foremost; we are creating and managing library web sites. We are portals of information not only for our own services but for our local communities, and we are springboards to the Internet. We are the collections. We professionally select electronic as well as traditional, print based information. We are undertaking that sort of professional selection role, subscribing to online and CD-ROM databases. We are the means—the hardware and software, the Internet, CD-ROM, email and the other functionalities that people now expect, such as word processing and spreadsheets. All of those sorts of services are available. In support of what Councillor Carland said, we had an instance earlier this week when someone was doing their own do-it-yourself divorce on the Internet and wanted some assistance with that.

With respect to learning and training, we now play an incredibly huge role. We are community learning centres offering introductory and specialised training in an informal and often a non-threatening local environment. That ranges from one-on-one assistance through to classroom style, small group and larger group training. Finally, we are the staff. We are the personal, professional interface, the human, between a member of the public and the information technology.

When you think of public libraries and the Internet in particular, the online environment, most of us have only had a great deal of exposure for a maximum of seven or eight years. Libraries have always been at the forefront of the local government environment in pushing along our local councils into that media. We continue to do that, although we do so within an environment of financial constraint and certainly, increasingly, bandwidth constraint. We are very much into joining cooperatives—NSW.net, of course, being the one that will largely have been spoken about for ISP services and content.

In terms of Kinetica, the MPLA and our sister organisation, the CPLA, were the first groups to organise a consortia purchasing deal with Kinetica, which is to the advantage of both our members and our end users; it does have some financial benefits for us. We are part of LIAC, the ABS e-extension program and the recently launched Di@YLL, which is a drug and alcohol information program at libraries. One that the MPLA has initiated is called SPARQ—Sydney

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Public Libraries Answer Reference Questions—which is an email reference service. Our customers can log on their inquiry via email and it is then routed by postcode and the email response is supplied by the appropriate library.

In support of what others have said, we believe we truly need bandwidth connectivity, appropriate funding and appropriate staff training. This is a very new, changing and emerging environment. When library staff were trained several years ago, it would not have been imagined that they would have to create and manage web sites, that they would be developing online tutorials, that they would be doing the daily troubleshooting for both hardware and software that they are currently doing.

**Senator TIERNEY**—On the question of Kinetica, you have said, along with a number of people this morning, that it should be free. I am wondering whether that is wise. You might argue for lower costs, but do you think it is wise to make it free in the sense of the way in which people would then use a free resource? Wouldn't more resources then be sucked up because of overuse or inappropriate use if it is free?

**Ms Wallace**—The charging certainly does impact on the way Kinetica is used. Prior to the negotiation of the MPLA consortia licence, every time the enter button was hit, there was a dollar charge. That certainly had some influence on whether or not people chose to offer that service; whether they would use Kinetica in a search on behalf of a member of the public. With our new arrangements, where we have an up-front cost regardless of usage, we can now offer that service freely to our end users. Our staff no longer have the constraint of thinking about, 'Will I do it, or will I not offer that service?'

**Senator TIERNEY**—Councillor Carland, you mentioned that there has been a steady drop in the state government contribution. Senator Tchen told me earlier that in Victoria it has gone from 50 per cent to 25 per cent, and you are saying that in New South Wales it has gone from 10 per cent down to nine per cent over 20 years.

**Councillor Carland**—From 20 per cent down to nine per cent.

**Senator TIERNEY**—I presume the rest is being picked up by local government. Have they picked up the shortfall?

**Councillor Carland**—The answer is yes.

**Senator TIERNEY**—Have the state government ever explained to your association why they are slowly withdrawing support for library services, seeing that it is so systematic?

**Councillor Carland**—I have not heard what I would call a comprehensive explanation. I think there have been incidents where funds have in essence been diverted into other, related initiatives. Perhaps NSW.net would be a good example. When the state government recently announced \$13.95 million in funding over four years, it was not highly stressed that \$8 million was for NSW.net and only \$5.95 million over four years was the effective increase in library funding provided. That is fairly meagre.

**Senator TIERNEY**—You mentioned the importance, in a cost-saving sense, of consortia agreements and networking cooperatives. Could you explain how they work and the benefits to you in terms of your libraries in New South Wales?

**Councillor Carland**—That is a broad question but I will do my best. I made an earlier observation that IT is a business where scale is important, notwithstanding that we are on the fairly prosperous end of the national spectrum in the lower North Shore. We do not have an area of large population. The five member councils collectively have 221,000 residents. It is fairly expensive on a per resident basis for each of those councils to set up the required infrastructure from scratch for their local library. It is the way of IT that you have rather large fixed costs and very low marginal costs. If we are able to spread those fixed costs across a broader resident base, it drops very rapidly per head of population and the marginal costs are then very low as we increment to additional capacity. That is very much what Shorelink has found as it has developed over the last 20 years. It has enabled its member councils to provide a much richer standard of service to their residents than they could have provided individually. It is classic accounting.

**Senator TIERNEY**—You mentioned Internet training initiatives for clients with disabilities. How successful has that been?

**Ms Sutherland**—It has been quite successful. It is not only for those with disabilities. We run weekly sessions for seniors and people that have no computer skills at all. We also run sessions for the visually impaired, with open book computers. They have embraced the Internet like the general community have.

**Senator TIERNEY**—What do you do with your surplus books?

**Ms Sutherland**—We discard books that are not in good condition. We have a book fair table where we sell books that are in good condition to our members. We raise a very small amount through that; it is more a service than a revenue-raising activity. We give them away to charities like Lifeline that may be running book fairs.

**Senator TIERNEY**—In terms of metropolitan public libraries, do you do anything international with nearby neighbours?

**Councillor Carland**—Not to my knowledge.

**Senator TIERNEY**—It all stays in Australia?

**Ms Wallace**—The MPLA does not have a joint policy on that. It is left up to the local councils that own the resources—the books—to decide how they want to distribute them after they have finished their life within the library.

**Senator LUNDY**—Ms Wallace, can you provide a general description of the relationship that your membership has generally with Telstra and other connectivity service suppliers?

**Ms Wallace**—As I think was said earlier, many of us have voluntarily joined NSW.net for our telecommunications and Internet services.

**Senator LUNDY**—What does that provide?

**Ms Wallace**—It provides Internet access for our councils and/or libraries. The original initiative was meant to actually provide services to the whole of the council. Some local government areas chose to provide it only to their libraries and to use a different supplier for council. In my library—and I am sure there were many others experiencing a similar difficulty, particularly the larger metropolitan libraries—the original configuration of the NSW.net service was outgrown very rapidly, because the Internet service was not used just for libraries but for Internet shopping, for Meals on Wheels and for a whole range of council functions where the Internet was a very appropriate vehicle. We are now part of a trial of ADSL services through NSW.net, and that has been extremely successful. The move to a faster response time and to better bandwidth has meant it is a very reliable service. There are others within the metropolitan area, such as City of Sydney, as was mentioned earlier, who have chosen to go it alone in terms of negotiating their own ISP, but we are happy with what has been offered to us through NSW.net as an ADSL supplier.

**Senator LUNDY**—Who is the carrier or carriage service provider of the actual service?

**Ms Wallace**—I would have to check that, I am sorry.

**Senator LUNDY**—How long have you had the ADSL trial going?

**Ms Wallace**—It has been going for about six months. As I say, we are extremely happy with it at the moment. It is always a concern that you outgrow anything—that is, once you expand capacity, your functions grow to fill that capacity. The difference has been absolutely noticeable from the staff perspective and from our feedback from the public.

**Senator LUNDY**—You have gone from effectively the equivalent of dial-up to faster—

**Ms Wallace**—We went from down the copper wire—normal telephone speed—to the compressed ADSL. I am not sure what it is technically, but—

**Senator LUNDY**—I think it varies, but it is up there.

**Ms Wallace**—it is exponentially better.

**Senator LUNDY**—You really notice that?

**Ms Wallace**—You absolutely do.

**Senator LUNDY**—In terms of the structure of NSW.net, how significant is the cost of that? Is it an exercise in reducing the connectivity costs because of aggregated demand? Is the model meaningful in terms of cost of telecommunications?

**Ms Wallace**—NSW.net was established as a consortium that would make these services more affordable to all public libraries, but there was always an understanding that rural and regional libraries required substantially more financial support than metropolitan libraries. I am not sure that there are huge financial incentives in being part of NSW.net. I think the incentives are

different from that for larger metropolitan libraries. It is about content—about buying the consortium content that is available—and it is about being able to be part of trials like we are with ADSL, so being at the forefront of what is actually being offered. We are very much aware that we are part of a state-wide network; going into initiatives that involve our counterparts across the state has been an important thing that libraries have always done.

**Senator LUNDY**—Do you find that the issue of download caps on any of those ADSL products affects your members?

**Ms Wallace**—The ADSL supplier we have through NSW.net has a suite of options, so you can tailor the package you purchased depending on the traffic on the line. We have probably tended to go to the upper level of what we thought we needed, and we have had no difficulties.

**Senator LUNDY**—Ms Sutherland, do you use NSW.net in the library where you work?

**Ms Sutherland**—Shorelink uses Telstra. We use frame relay and HDSL.

**Senator LUNDY**—Can you put how much that costs you in some sort of perspective as far as your overall running costs are concerned?

**Ms Sutherland**—When we upgraded to the last system in October 2001 we put in a 10-gigabyte line between Shorelink and the member libraries.

**Senator LUNDY**—Between all the member libraries?

**Ms Sutherland**—Yes. That worked for less than a year. We have just recently upgraded to a 20-gigabyte line and we have already had instances of exceeding capacity in the last three months. The demand is huge. We are about to undertake a review because we cannot afford the cost of doubling our capacity.

**Senator LUNDY**—Is it megabyte or gigabyte?

**Ms Sutherland**—Gigabytes.

**Senator LUNDY**—Wow! What are the costs of running that as a proportion of overall costs?

**Ms Sutherland**—The last increase was an annual cost of \$64,000. It is a significant part of our costs.

**Senator LUNDY**—Is the proportion going up?

**Ms Sutherland**—Yes. It certainly did in the last 12 months.

**Senator LUNDY**—Is the download cap an issue?

**Ms Sutherland**—No.

**Senator LUNDY**—Is that because you do not have a download cap?

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**Councillor Carland**—We just pay a higher marginal rate if we exceed our agreed monthly number of 20 gigabytes. The cost of the next megabyte is higher than the average cost of the preceding megabytes. It tends to be priced in chunks. The next step for us if we confirm that we are going to consistently exceed 20 gigabytes is to go to Telstra and get a price for, say, 30 gigabytes. Casual excesses, which is what we have moved into now, tend to have penal pricing to encourage you to contract for bigger assured capacity.

**Senator LUNDY**—Do you get any special treatment because you are a library or a group of libraries?

**Councillor Carland**—I have not noticed that. I think we are treated as a normal commercial customer. Having said that, frame relay is very reliable.

**Senator LUNDY**—What about the MPLA? Do you get any special treatment because you are a group of not-for-profit organisations providing community and public services?

**Ms Wallace**—I would think not. The only benefits we may get would be small—NSW.net being a very large organisation—but we are quite aware that if we went to the open market and specified exactly what we required on an individual site basis there would be other competitors out there that would be able to give us just as good a deal as we are currently getting.

**Senator LUNDY**—Regarding the arrangements you have with Telstra and frame relay, what opportunities do you have to encourage contestability? How often do you go out to tender? How long is your current contract for? Are you able to leverage competition in the market for the bandwidth you require?

**Ms Sutherland**—I think we are. I will have to get back to you on the length of our current contract. I certainly know that we are undertaking a review later in the year and we do look at other products. We would consider moving. We are not tied in.

**Councillor Carland**—We do not see ourselves as tied to them. We are just content, for want of a better word, with what we have from Telstra. The community review that was referred to, which we commissioned only last night and which will come in over the next few months, will tell us what the competitive options are and we will certainly explore them if there is a better provider out there.

**Senator TCHEN**—Firstly, I thank MPLA and Shorelink for their submission. It was very clearly and precisely set out. It is always a help to us to read submissions like this. Reading your submission, it is very clear that the public library system has very proactively responded to the community's need to access information, so congratulations to you as well.

You have fairly precisely described what you have done and how it has responded to community needs. You have also talked about what further things should be done. I will not ask you to go over those again, but could you elaborate on what you see as the limitations to the public library system in continuing and also expanding the services that you provide to the public, particularly in the context of electronic information access. You talk about revenues, costs and funding needs and so on: can you elaborate on that?

**Councillor Carland**—Is your question directed towards what you see as the constraints on the libraries in terms of meeting customer wishes, or is your question directed towards whether there are limits on the things we should seek to provide to our customers—

**Senator TCHEN**—No, not limits on what you should provide but what you see as limits to your ability to continue to meet public needs.

**Ms Sutherland**—Physical space is a limit with North Sydney and the other Shorelink libraries, because we do not have sufficient room to install any more Internet access terminals. We are also constrained by our security systems, our firewall systems. We have increasing demands to let people download and upload information and we cannot provide access. We are under increasing pressure to provide email services. We currently do not offer an email service—we see that as a value added service—just because we physically do not have the space and the equipment to provide it. We also have staffing issues. We have staff training issues. We are open for 69 hours a week and we have a lot of staff who work at various times and training is a great expense to us, but it is something that we are very committed to doing. However, there is a need for more ongoing training than we can offer. We also have problems with the number of staff we can roster on at any one time. We have had a decreasing number of staff, along with increasing demand for both traditional and online services.

**Senator TCHEN**—In your written submission, under topic E, you say that government—presumably that is all levels of government—should make a commitment guaranteeing funding for online services, thus giving libraries a firmer basis for online service programs and delivery. How could such funding best be allocated—not worrying about where it comes from first, but how it should be allocated.

**Ms Sutherland**—It should be allocated according to needs—it is a difficult thing to instantly assess. There are certainly varying abilities of public libraries to respond to—

**Senator TCHEN**—Should there be some sort of national standard?

**Ms Sutherland**—Yes, it would be an ideal arrangement to have some sort of national standard.

**Senator TCHEN**—What about the source of funding?

**Ms Sutherland**—We believe that both federal and state governments have a role to play in increasing funding to local government. That is because we are delivering increasing online services for both federal and state governments and, to date, we have a very small contribution from the state government but no measurable contribution from federal government.

**Senator TCHEN**—The federal government does provide specific projects, doesn't it?

**Ms Sutherland**—None that come to mind.

**Senator TCHEN**—The nature of federal funding, particularly for local government, is that it tends to be on a project basis rather than recurrent.

**Ms Sutherland**—There is a great need in the public library for capital works funding to increase the capacity of the buildings in order to operate in this new environment. In the last 20 years we have moved our book stock to make room for two computers here and three computers there. It is a very piecemeal approach. We just do not have the physical capacity. So funding for buildings would go a long way to alleviating some of the problems that public libraries have.

**Councillor Carland**—That would cover expansion. Even within existing buildings there is a need to add infrastructure in terms of conduit, service risers for cables and server-housing rooms. Very few older libraries have the sorts of premises that are suitable for that.

**Senator TCHEN**—Ms Wallace, would you like to add anything?

**Ms Wallace**—It just occurred to me that enhancing the relationship between the National Library and public libraries is one area in which the mechanism for some of those projects, programs and funding opportunities might be able to be grown. We certainly have a close relationship with our State Library, and although the funding base is relatively small it is still a productive relationship. Our relationship with the National Library is limited at this time to our Kinetica service, but certainly that is one vehicle where enhanced programming and distribution of funding for particular projects should perhaps be looked at.

**Senator TCHEN**—In the case of New South Wales, with council providing 90 per cent of the funding, the situation is probably less complex. Usually, the problem with getting funding is that whoever pays the money would like to have a say in how it is managed. In your view, is there any need for policy constraints or policy input from the federal and state governments in the public libraries, apart from the funding side? Supposing there is an increase in funding, do you believe that policy guidance would be important as well?

**Ms Wallace**—The MPLA certainly identified that we would like to have a national information strategy for the future—a blueprint that recognises the vital role of libraries. Also, I think there is a sort of leadership factor that the federal government has taken in terms of all government departments providing information. But, as we said earlier, the funnel then comes down to how well the public library can interpret and provide access to that information. Yes, we would like to have an overarching policy; we would like to see a recognition of the relationship between libraries, other information providers and, indeed, the other parts of the cultural industries, and how they fit together. I think the leadership the federal government can take could extend into a blueprint for the future.

**Senator TCHEN**—I take it that is in addition to the professional leadership that the National Library provides.

**Ms Wallace**—Yes. I think it extends to all facets of federal government.

**Senator TCHEN**—I am not sure whether it was the submission of MPLA or Shorelink which talked about the need for a national peak body for public libraries. Was that in your submission?

**Ms Wallace**—I think it was possibly in both. There is a very embryonic move towards a national peak body for public libraries. There is a sense within our industry that, because of the fragmentation because we are all largely responsible to our own local government areas, we have not had one voice, one area for development and discovery of policy initiatives and, also,

the possibility of lobbying and promotion of our services. PLA, Public Libraries Australia, is in its infancy at the moment.

**Senator TCHEN**—In your submission you stated:

For many people the public library provides their only means of accessing information and recreational resources. Libraries are critical to the intellectual health of their communities.

You also stated:

Public libraries have the capacity to be the key to the development of “learning communities”.

Do you see this as an existing situation or a situation which should be aimed for in the future? In other words, is it a situation that has just developed and is a transient position or do you see it as a position that communities should consciously maintain?

**Ms Wallace**—I think it has been our past and I think it will be our future. There will always be emerging community interest. I cannot envisage a society where there will not be the need for people to have access to a whole range of information sources. Private ownership will not be the only solution to that. I do see it as a future need in addition to being the current situation that I described.

**Senator TCHEN**—Councillor Carland, would you like to add a comment?

**Councillor Carland**—I support what Ms Wallace said. With regard to your question about policy framework, a useful element in such a policy framework would be a recognition that both state and federal government departments are seeking to change their client interfaces to push more of their client activity online. That is fine and it is an inevitable trend, but I think it needs to be recognised that that creates a consequent demand on library services which is not really being explicitly recognised so far in the budgeting. I think the policy has to link the two elements of the benefit to the departments in displacing counter activity and the necessary funding to a library to supplement its ability to handle that demand.

**Senator TCHEN**—It is creeping cost shifting, is it?

**Councillor Carland**—Yes; that is fairly clear.

**CHAIR**—With regard to your proposal for funding, it is not usual to get a clear understanding of where the funding might come from. Do you think that one of the problems for local government in funding libraries is that, because they are so valued by the community, the community is willing for the council to allocate money in the budget to them ahead of some other things, and therefore both state and federal governments take advantage of that willingness? Could you comment on that?

**Councillor Carland**—I think local councils have been fairly stoic over the last decade in picking up the slack. I think they have certainly been unwilling to see their library services decline. They are simply driven by popular sentiment in that regard. As an elected councillor in North Sydney, the clear message that comes through to me is that the community wants their library services maintained and enhanced. Many residents look to libraries to lead them into the

online world and libraries are seeking to do that. Councils have come up with the funding. But when state government funding is reduced from 20 per cent to nine per cent and you see the ratchet continuing downwards, it does seem that that funding is tending towards vanishing levels, which is an unsustainable trend.

**CHAIR**—We will finish on that point. Thank you very much for waiting for your session, for your submissions and for appearing before the committee. And good luck!

**Committee adjourned at 11.18 a.m.**