



## **Submission in response to the Infrastructure Australia Audit**

**31 October 2019**

### **1. About us**

#### **ALIA**

The Australian Library and Information Association is the professional organisation for the Australian library and information services sector. On behalf of our 5,000 personal and institutional members, we provide the national voice of the profession in the development, promotion and delivery of quality library and information services to the nation, through leadership, advocacy and mutual support.

#### **National, State and Territory Libraries**

There are nine National, State and Territory Libraries, located in capital cities around Australia, attracting more than 9.5 million visitors each year, and holding collections valued at \$4.1 billion.<sup>1</sup> Many of these libraries are important civic buildings, providing a focal point for the city as well as access to documentary heritage. At the same time, they have a high-profile online presence, with more than 47 million visits to their websites per annum, including visits to Trove, the National Library of Australia's platform containing a wealth of newspaper articles, journals, books, images and other cultural assets.<sup>2</sup> Trove is the fourth most visited Australian Government website. It has nearly 250,000 registered public users and serves more than 20 million unique users each year.

#### **Australia's public library network**

Australia has more than 1600 central, branch and mobile libraries, with 9.3 million registered members and more than 114 million customer visits each year. Offering books, magazines, newspapers, DVDs, wifi, PC internet access, learning programs, fun activities and expert staff help, they are a much loved, highly regarded and trusted community resource. In 2016-2017, the number of public access internet devices provided by public libraries nationally grew to 13,531.<sup>3</sup>

---

<sup>1</sup> <https://www.nsla.org.au/index.php/about>

<sup>2</sup> <https://trove.nla.gov.au/>

<sup>3</sup> [https://www.nsla.org.au/sites/default/files/documents/aust\\_pub\\_lib\\_stats\\_report\\_2016-17\\_final\\_8.pdf](https://www.nsla.org.au/sites/default/files/documents/aust_pub_lib_stats_report_2016-17_final_8.pdf)

Over the last 20 years, public libraries have increased their role in the digital space, enhancing people's online experiences, helping people connect to this new virtual world, and providing a safety net for those who are in danger of being left behind, particularly in terms of the ability to access government information.

### **Education and special libraries**

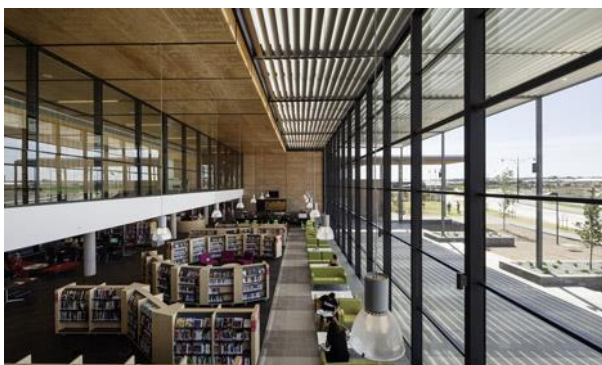
In addition to our National, State, Territory and public libraries, there are approximately 9,400 school libraries, 2,000 special libraries (health, law, government, corporate, heritage, arts, media) and 450 university and TAFE libraries. All libraries contribute in some way to Australia's social infrastructure.

## **2. Libraries and the built environment**

State Libraries are significant landmark buildings, symbols of the cultural life of their capital cities. In Adelaide, Brisbane and Perth, the State Libraries are anchor buildings within the cultural precinct. In Melbourne and Sydney, the State Libraries have undergone major renovations, increasing spaces for public exhibitions and programs and opening up the potential for an even greater audience.

Public libraries are often the physical manifestation of a city's ambition to be a smart city. They provide both an architectural focal point and engaging experiences that help create a strong sense of community. Often, they are centrepieces for civic renewal and provide the social cohesion for greenfield developments. New builds are frequently a partnership between all three levels of government, recognising that an investment in libraries is an investment in informed, active, digitally-enabled citizens.

These Victorian public libraries are good examples of the kind of developments which can be found across Australia.



*Craigieburn Library by Francis Jones Morehen Thorp*

Craigieburn public library was built before many of the homes around it, giving residents of this new outer Melbourne development a sense of place and a multi-purpose facility, including childcare and access to government services. The library was presented with the International Public Library of the Year 2014 award<sup>4</sup>.

---

<sup>4</sup> [https://www.hume.vic.gov.au/Whats\\_On/Latest\\_News/International\\_recognition\\_for\\_Craigieburn\\_Library](https://www.hume.vic.gov.au/Whats_On/Latest_News/International_recognition_for_Craigieburn_Library)



The City of Melbourne's Library at the Dock was also shortlisted for this international award. Since opening in 2014, it has brought heart to the Docklands development, which previously lacked the kind of infrastructure that is essential to forging a strong community.

*Alistair Roche (Own work) [CC BY-SA 4.0] via Wikimedia Commons*

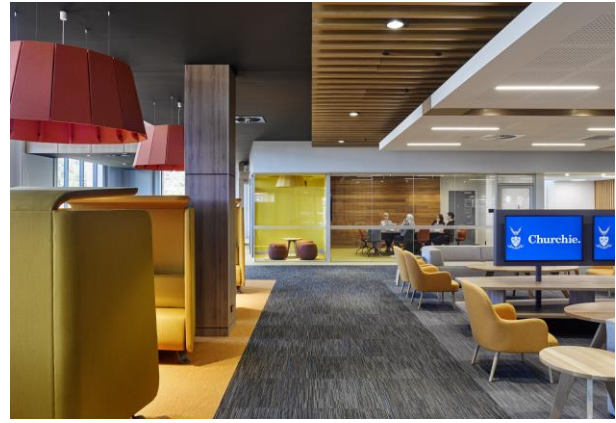
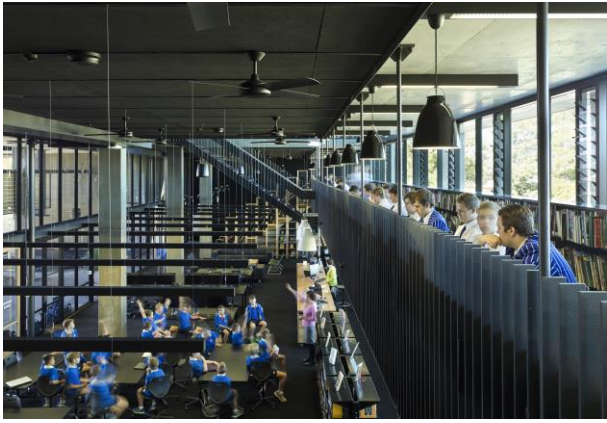


The award-winning Geelong Library is located in the heart of Geelong's creative precinct. It is an outstanding piece of architecture that captures the eye but does not dominate its community. It balances the traditional with the progressive and will stand as an example of how a contemporary public library can act as an inspiration for its community for many decades to come.



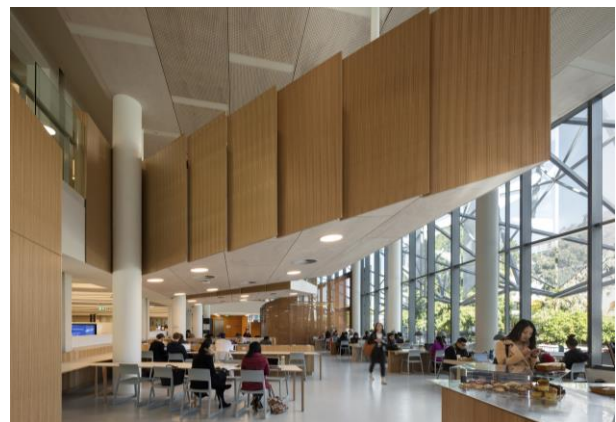
Casey Cardinia Libraries' newest library at Bunjil Place is part of a creative precinct that has set a new benchmark for local government investment. It cost \$125 million to build and at last count was attracting more than 2 million visits per annum. It draws inspiration from the Wedgetail eagle, a totemic representation that acknowledges the traditional owners of the land and links our ancient past with big aspirations for the future.

School libraries are knowledge hubs, representing the school community's investment in learning beyond the classroom walls. The Building the Education Revolution (BER) federal government economic stimulus program to address the Global Financial Crisis (2007-2010) saw new library buildings for government schools, but without the associated funding for staff and collections. While investment in government schools has fallen away since 2010, private schools have continued to create flagship libraries, showing the importance that teachers, parents and students in well-funded situations place on these versatile facilities.



*Hanly Learning Centre, St Joseph's Nudgee College Queensland (left) was the winner of the 2017 ALIA Library Design Awards school libraries category, followed by Churchie Centenary Library, also Queensland, in the 2019 awards (right).*

In universities and TAFEs, libraries continue to provide a core study space for students. While new acquisitions are more than 95% digital, tertiary education libraries are as well used as ever, providing learning commons areas for individual and group study.



*Winners of the ALIA Library Design Awards in 2019 and 2019 respectively were the John Philips library, Western Sydney University (left) and Monash University Caulfield Library, Victoria (right).*

### **3. Response to Chapter 6 Social Infrastructure**

The inclusion of education at 6.3 provides an opportunity to examine issues of equity in school library provision. As described earlier in this paper, there is a growing gap between library services in public and private schools. This is not only an issue with the age and appropriateness of the buildings, but also the funds available for collections and IT, and the lack of qualified staff. By contrast, most independent schools have contemporary facilities, appropriate operating budgets, and employ teacher librarians, librarians and library technicians.

Section 6.5 provides an excellent summary of the issues facing libraries in cities, towns and regional centres and the opportunities presented by digital infrastructure to increase audiences, access and participation.

- Libraries are smaller in scale than economic infrastructure but wide in reach, with more than 114 million visits to public libraries alone each year.
- The suitability and currency of public library buildings varies by state and territory and by local government area. While some communities benefit from new, state-of-the-art facilities, others have ageing buildings which are not fit for purpose. Often it depends on the ability of councils to attract funding for their community infrastructure from other levels of government.
- In areas of population growth, social infrastructure lags behind community need and libraries can be too small to accommodate user demand for study space, public access computers, quiet reading areas and group activities.
- Libraries are investing in digital infrastructure through the provision of electronic books and resources, some 13,500 internet-connected PCs and devices, free WiFi, and the digitisation of collections. However, much of this activity is funded through operating budgets which have not increased to accommodate the new demand for digital.
- We know that the services public libraries provide are highly valued and that they generate a return on investment of more than \$3 for every dollar spent in terms of community benefits.<sup>5</sup>
- Services for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities are shaped to local needs and delivered in ways that are respectful of cultural mores.<sup>6</sup>

#### 4. Summary

We welcome the inclusion of education, arts and culture in the review of Social Infrastructure and the recognition of the vital role of libraries and other cultural institutions in supporting the quality of life, education, health and wellbeing of communities.

The 2019 Audit report is a good summary of the issues facing National, State, Territory and public libraries. The growth in demand for physical spaces and digital access has rarely been accompanied by any increase in operating budgets and this is something we regularly raise with governments at all three levels.

While Chapter 6 touches briefly on the investment in school libraries as part of the BER (p417), there is no mention of the disparity between library facilities in public and private schools. We would like to see this articulated in the *Australian Infrastructure Plan* and a focus on government school libraries included in the *Infrastructure Priority List*.

#### **ALIA contact:**

Sue McKerracher, CEO, Australian Library and Information Association (ALIA)  
 9-11 Napier Close, Deakin ACT 2600 † 02 6215 8215 m 0404 456 749  
 w [www.alia.org.au](http://www.alia.org.au) e [sue.mckerracher@alia.org.au](mailto:sue.mckerracher@alia.org.au)

---

<sup>5</sup> <https://www.alia.org.au/sites/default/files/Contribution%20of%20Australian%20Public%20Libraries%20Report.pdf>

<sup>6</sup> [https://www.alia.org.au/sites/default/files/Indigenous%20collections%20and%20services%202019%20report\\_FINAL.pdf](https://www.alia.org.au/sites/default/files/Indigenous%20collections%20and%20services%202019%20report_FINAL.pdf)