



Australian  
Library and  
Information  
Association

**Submission from  
the Australian Library and Information Association (ALIA)  
to the Review of the Australian Government's use of  
Information and Communication Technology**

[ICTReview@finance.gov.au](mailto:ICTReview@finance.gov.au)

**ALIA contacts**

Karna O'Dea, ALIA ACT Branch Convenor  
Email: [jkodea@netspeed.com.au](mailto:jkodea@netspeed.com.au)

Roxanne Missingham, Parliamentary Librarian,  
Email: [Roxanne.Missingham@aph.gov.au](mailto:Roxanne.Missingham@aph.gov.au)

**Contents**

Executive Summary .....	2
Introduction .....	2
Purchasing of electronic resources .....	3
Managing online publications .....	5
Government services access through public libraries .....	6
National information discovery services .....	9



## Executive Summary

In summary, government libraries provide a key part of the information management infrastructure of government agencies. In order for public service employees and clients of government agencies to benefit from online information resources an approach is needed to ensure that:

- a) quality information resources are available cost-effectively to support policy development and program delivery;
- b) government information is available to clients, with a single infrastructure for long term access;
- c) public libraries have information and skills to fulfill their role supporting community access to government information; and
- d) the collaborative infrastructure is used to delivery access to government information collections.

## Introduction

The Australian Library and Information Association (ALIA) welcomes the Review of the Australian Government's use of Information and Communication Technology and the opportunity to present this submission.

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

In the Commonwealth libraries exist in all major agencies. In the last decade these libraries have evolved to deliver many of their services online, and, because of the skills sets of library and information management staff, to also delivery many agency online services such as intranets and web sites.

Libraries provide efficient and effective services using information technology by:

- a) Purchasing online databases and other content services for their agency, negotiating for value for money and reducing duplication of subscriptions;
- b) Purchasing together through consortia – such as the Australian Government Libraries Information Network consortium (see [www.nla.gov.au/aglin](http://www.nla.gov.au/aglin)) and Electronic Resources Australia ([era.nla.gov.au/index.html](http://era.nla.gov.au/index.html));
- c) Delivering access to collections of print resources online through networked access to their catalogues;
- d) Listing some of their collections, print and electronic, in the Australian National Bibliographic Database to enable automated resource discovery of the collections

through a single search and efficiently inter-library lending through the national system ([www.librariesaustralia.nla.gov.au](http://www.librariesaustralia.nla.gov.au));

- e) Providing information skills for staff in their agencies through training and assistance; and
- f) Supporting the work of their agencies through answering reference and research enquiries and using their information skills to answer these questions efficiently using online, print and other information resources.

Library staff have increasingly contributed to their organizations by assisting in the organisation and delivery of information through Intranets and Internet services. Many now allocate metadata, either in the library or through library staff they have been employed in web services in their agencies. By using these information skills agencies are able to very cost effectively improve access to their own information, rather than having to recreate and duplicate information that is required for the daily work of the agency.

ALIA suggests that the review consider both the value that can be provided by information professionals and four specific issues:

- a) How to maximise purchasing of electronic resources to enable a whole of government approach, purchasing key resources such as newspapers and reference materials such as encyclopedias across all agencies;
- b) The need for a connected government approach to managing online publications to reduce the number of duplicate systems and ensure effective and efficient delivery of these resources to the public for long term access;
- c) The need for support for the delivery of government information services through public libraries; and
- d) The need for full participation by government agencies in national resource discovery services such as Libraries Australia and PictureAustralia.

## **Purchasing of electronic resources**

Libraries have demonstrated that by working together, those in government agencies can have access to quality information resources and services.

**Electronic Resources Australia (ERA)** was created in response to the needs of individuals across the nation identified by the Senate inquiry. It was the outcome of considerable discussion by all library sectors. At the 4<sup>th</sup> and final National Licensing Proposal forum in 2007, all sectors agreed to develop a truly national purchasing consortium to purchase resources for Australians.

ERA sets out to:

- deliver access for Australians to quality resources through their libraries;
- it provides a national approach, managed by and for all Australian libraries for their users.

Electronic Resources Australia offers significant potential benefits for Australians and their libraries. It can provide access across geographical barriers, economies of scale, reduced duplication of effort in tendering for resources and maximizes the bargaining position of libraries. Subscriptions to their electronic resources are becoming more affordable for libraries, and this benefit would flow on to their users in improved services.

The ERA initiative opens the way to producing a framework for the creation of licences across different library sectors that satisfy the needs of libraries, consumers and vendors.

It will facilitate the creation of mutually effective agreements between all interested parties with regard to costs, access principles, authentication and performance measurements. However it is only with the cooperation of us all that the full benefits of ERA will be fully realised.

By working together Australian libraries can achieve greater outcomes for our customers; you too can be a part of history when you put your support behind this project.

ERA celebrates its first anniversary in 2008, having focused on delivering content to libraries through selecting, through a tender process, products which are of interest to many libraries. Products in three categories were selected:

- *Australian News & Business Information*
  - [ABI/INFORM®](#) Global / ProQuest
  - [Asian Business and Reference™](#) / ProQuest
  - [Australia & New Zealand Newsstand](#) / ProQuest
  
- *General Reference*
  - [Australia/New Zealand Reference Centre™](#) / EBSCO Publishing
  - [Oxford Reference Online: Premium Collection](#) / Oxford University Press
  - [World Book Online Reference Center](#) / Forward Learning Pty Ltd
  
- *Health Information*
  - [Consumer Health Complete™](#) / EBSCO Publishing
  - [Health & Wellness Resource Center](#) / Gale Cengage Learning
  - [Health Reference Center Academic](#) / Gale Cengage Learning

In total there are 485 libraries and consortia from all sectors subscribing to products through ERA:

## Summary of libraries/ consortia subscribing through ERA

	ACT	NSW	SA	WA	VIC	TAS	NT	QLD	Total
Public	0	24	18	2	11	0	0	6	61
Academic	0	1	0	1	2	0	0	1	5
School	5	131	59	37	113	2	2	21	370
TAFE	1	1	1	1	5	0	0	0	9
Special	14	5	1	1	5	1	2	3	32
MSLA	2	1	1	1	1	1	1	0	8
Totals	22	163	80	43	137	4	5	31	485

Tab. 1: ERA: Summary of libraries subscribing 2007/08

These figures demonstrate a significant benefit to the nation, based on a strong commitment by many libraries. While we had anticipated a slow start because of the complexities of change, the small product range and the complexities of our acquisition program, this is a very significant achievement.

All commonwealth government employees could access the high quality resources if there was a nationally funded model. The current basis for the consortium results in access dependent on agency funding models, which, given these are a key set of resources, is less than adequate for an informed public service.

ALIA recommends that funding for all government agencies occur to enable access to these key resources.

## Managing online publications

Access to government information, particularly government publications, has offered great challenges in Australia. From the beginning of formalised government publishing there were difficulties. Publishing in Australia commenced with white settlement.

In the twenty first century Commonwealth agencies are providing extensive access to information through their Web services. The concept of 'publications' from the print world underpins the delivery of large documents, partly taking forward the original vision of the Information Management Steering Committee (IMSC) for increased public dissemination of government information.

At present many access mechanisms exist for Commonwealth government publications, not including the many web search engines. They are the Commonwealth publications gateway (publications.gov.au), the Australian National Bibliographic Database, library catalogues and agency websites with search engines. Access is fragmented and confusing for users. Publications.gov.au provides access to many web pages which are not publications, such as job advertisements and is often woefully out of date. In its report the IMSC proposed:

Recommendation 5. Create a single official Internet-accessible Commonwealth Government Entry Point, provided under a service level agreement with CGIO, to have the Internet address <http://www.fed.gov.au>.

Recommendation 6. In order to achieve increased visibility of government information holdings, approve in principle the establishment of an Australian Government Information Locator System (AusGILS) and request the Australian Archives to develop an implementation plan. (IMSC, Management of Government Information as a National Strategic Resource, Canberra, AGPS, 1997)

The current solution is a failure in terms of delivering access to publications and a solution must be re thought. In addition there is great duplication with records collective by all the resource discovery services, with duplicated metadata creation and maintenance.

In addition many online government publications are managed for short term access and the Australian public has access which is limited by the fragmented management of web sites. Managing long terms access systems for every government agency would unnecessarily require duplicate systems and maintaining software for small collections. The National Library of Australia created the Pandora national archive of Australian digital publications in 1996 and it contains a significant number of government publications. The system that they developed meets international digital preservation standards and using this single infrastructure would mean that document could be stored once for long term national access. Agency web sites could then be managed for short term access and the resources which need to be made available for historical or archival reasons could be sent to the Library.

For efficient access to web resources and to maximize single systems we recommend that the National Library be funded to store government online publications for long term access.

### **Government services access through public libraries**

Libraries have historically provided extensive access to government publications. Formal arrangement for supplying resources to libraries have included the parliamentary paper distribution scheme, the Australian Bureau of Statistics Library Extension Program and the Free Library Distribution Scheme of the Australian Government Information Management Office (previously the by the Australian Government Publishing Service). These programs ensured that national, state, selected public and university libraries were supplied with copies of government publications The program has enabled citizens to have access to government information through a range of geographically dispersed libraries.

In the predominantly online environment, it could have been expected that libraries would not need to be involved in providing access to government publications and e-

government services. Research has shown, however, that this is not the case, and that the role of public libraries is even more important, particularly for those without Internet access at home.

Public libraries have had to pick up the burden of supporting public use of government services. A study of New South Wales public libraries found:

- **Increasing demand**  
Most librarians report increasing client use of individual Government websites, for both content information and process or transaction based purposes.
- **An invisible draw on resources**  
While libraries were aware of some high-demand government online services, librarians rarely had an overview of all government services accessed by their clients... (State Library of New South Wales 2004 *Public Libraries +eGovernment*, Sydney, The Library, <http://www.sl.nsw.gov.au/pln/projects/summary.pdf>)

The communities increased reliance of public libraries for support for use of government services has been unanticipated by those producing these services. Only a small number of agencies provide training and information support to public libraries in this role. The Australian Bureau of Statistics Library extension program is a good model of extending information to Australians through public libraries through activities based in all states and territories.

Public libraries provide many who cannot afford internet access with computers to use government and other online services. The number of computers has increased and demand continues to grow:

	ACT	NSW	NT	QLD	SA	TAS	VIC	WA	Australia
2001-02	56	1,452	68	718	503	92	1,065	425	4,379
2002-03	65	1,630	68	900	518	94	1,170	570	5,015
2003-04	72	1,773	70	976	586	100	1,154	570	5,301
2004-05	77	1,963	122	1,194	628	100	1,251	630	5,965
2005-06	72	2,082	133	1,388	636	115	1,354	676	6,456
Change over 5 year period	29%	43%	96%	93%	26%	25%	27%	59%	47%
Change to previous year	-6%	6%	9%	16%	1%	15%	8%	7%	8%

Tab. 2: Public Access Internet Terminals in public libraries (National & State Libraries Australasia, *Australian public libraries statistical report 2006-06*, <http://www.nsla.org.au/publications/statistics/2006/pdf/NSLA.Statistics-20061102-Australian.Public.Library.Statistics.Report.2005.2006.pdf>)

Research into public libraries in the United States echoes the Australian trends:

Public access to the Internet and computers is transforming public libraries into de facto e-government access points... This new role

for public libraries is not just user-initiated. Government agencies now refer people to public libraries to receive both access to and assistance with online services. (Bertot, "Drafted: I Want You to Deliver E-Government", *Library Journal*, 15 August 2006, <http://www.libraryjournal.com/index.asp?layout=articlePrint&articleid=CA63598662006>).

Public libraries have been funded in other countries to support access through public libraries. In the United Kingdom, funding for the Peoples network (<http://www.peoplesnetwork.gov.uk/>) has enabled public libraries to develop both improved skills in library staff and improved services for resource discovery of e-government, including government publications and services. By delivering on a policy to develop online services with libraries as a key delivery component the community, particularly those in lower socio-economic groups, access to e-government has been successfully supported.

In addition public libraries offer particularly support for those with a disability. For this community, access to information is a very significant challenge. A recent study in Victoria found:

The provision of fast, reliable, cheap (or preferably free) internet access at public libraries was found to be very important. The vast majority of respondents with disabilities use the internet and they use it at public libraries at a significantly higher rate than do people in the general population.

Importantly, over half the respondents with disabilities also said they would like to use the internet more. Given the fact that so many services are now provided online and the internet is such an entrenched part of modern life, equal access to it for everyone is vital. Public libraries in Victoria play an important role in mitigating the effects of the "digital divide" on people with a disability.

The most common complaints about internet access at the library included:

- not enough computers available
- long waiting times to get access to a computer
- session times on the computer too short
- lack of adaptive and assistive equipment and software.

*(More than just equipment: Internet access and participation for people with a disability in Victorian public libraries, Melbourne, Equity Research Centre, [http://www.equityresearch.org.au/files\\_pdf/More-than-just-equipment.pdf](http://www.equityresearch.org.au/files_pdf/More-than-just-equipment.pdf))*

For this community, public library services are vital and require improvement. ALIA recommends that support be provided to public libraries to assist Australians to use the

resources provided online by Australian government agencies, including supporting the provision of public access internet terminals in public libraries, and providing skills to support use of online information resources.

## **National information discovery services**

Currently library services for government agencies have separate policies and funding frameworks. For efficiency reasons the services need to be integrated and duplication reduced. ALIA notes that the concept of “Connected Government” is increasing being adopted through the public sector and particularly through the Council of Australian Governments (COAG). The Management Advisory Committee (MAC) report notes that:

There are many imperatives which make being successful at whole of government work increasingly important. These include pressures on the APS to offer sophisticated whole of government policy advice which comprehends a range of stakeholders' views, and to respond to complex policy challenges such as environmental or rural issues. There are pressures to join up program management, including security threats and intractable social issues such as drug dependence. There are rising community expectations for easier access to government by integrating service delivery. Agencies should review the impact of these imperatives on their work, including taking a long-term view of possible scenarios.

Whole of government approaches to Australian government work are a relative strength for Australia and are not new. The increasing pressures on the APS demands that its history in whole of government work is understood to ensure it is not necessary to 'reinvent the wheel', yet work practices are continually improved. (*Connecting Government: Whole of Government Responses to Australia's Priority Challenge*, Canberra, Australian Public Service Commission, <http://www.apsc.gov.au/mac/connectinggovernment.htm>)

For efficient information access, those working in government agencies should be able to identify material held in all government libraries and access the resources which have been paid for by government funds through a single system. The Australian National Bibliographic Database lists some but not all collections. A commitment is required to ensure that all government library collections are listed. In addition, digitised government information resources, such as pictures, need to be accessible through national resource discovery systems such as PictureAustralia. The cost of participation is minimal and a whole of government approach could enable the client of government agencies to quickly and easily access these information resources. Again a commitment rather than funding is required.