Australian Library and Information Association

Submission to the Select Committee on Adopting Artificial Intelligence (AI)

Introduction

Library and information professionals' expertise in information ethics, knowledge management, intellectual freedom and literacy uniquely places them as mediators between the current and future possibilities of an AI enhanced world. The library and information services (LIS) sector is committed to fundamental principles of equity of access to information, knowledge and culture; respect for the individuality and diversity of people; the importance of literacies for all; and the protection of privacy. These values inform the LIS sector's adoption of AI and this submission.

While AI is not new, the rapid increase in consumer-level AI tools and major breakthroughs in areas such as health have concentrated attention on these powerful technologies. LIS industries have been using AI technologies for many years and continue to look at ways that AI can enhance the preservation, discoverability and use of collections in ethical and sustainable fashion.[1]

At the same time libraries, as key institutions supporting Australians with inclusion and literacies across the lifespan, are on the frontline of the skills gap. AI tools are rolling out faster than support for AI literacy, and into a population that is already challenged by gaps in digital, information and media literacy.

This submission primarily speaks to the positive steps that libraries, with government assistance, can take to ensure that Australians are AI included – that is they have affordable access to AI tools and are able to competently and confidently understand and engage with AI products in everyday life.

It secondarily speaks to the complexity of managing rights and interests in the "inputs" and "outputs" of generative AI, including those of First Nations people, and the potential immediate and longer-term impacts on creative, educational, research and LIS sectors.

About ALIA

The Australian Library and Information Association (ALIA) is the national body for libraries and information services in Australia. Libraries work in diverse settings in Australia, and ALIA's members include public, school, VET, university, government, health, law, special and national, territory and state libraries. Wherever situated, libraries in Australia are committed to the provision of information to their communities, working to ensure an informed, literate, and inclusive democratic society.

AI inclusion

Many Australians are familiar with the concept of digital inclusion, which encompasses access, affordability and ability. Educational and public libraries play a particularly important role in digital inclusion, ensuring that all Australians have (generally free) access to the internet, computing equipment and digital literacy programs and support. Across the (still COVID-impacted) 2021-2022 financial year,

[1] Bell, Zafiroglu, Assaad, Bradley, Cooper, O'Brien, Reid and Ruster (2022) Custodians and Midwives, the Library of the Future. Accessed: https://cybernetics.anu.edu.au/assets/Custodians_and_Midwives_FINAL_web.pdf

public libraries provided 4.8 million hours of wifi use, 14,247 public internet devices and 42,766 digital inclusion sessions.[2]

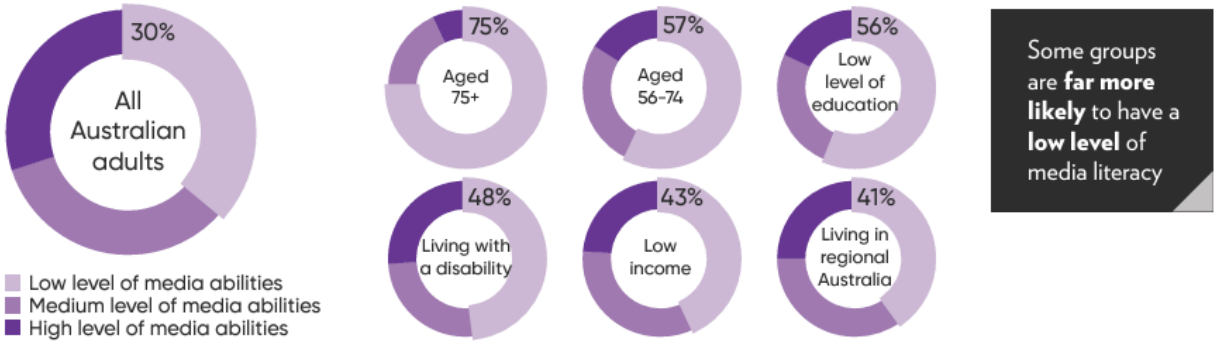
We can conceptualise AI inclusion in the same way, encompassing access, affordability and ability. If we consider that AI is a technology with the capacity to shape economies, workplaces and societies in a similar was to digital technologies, then it is absolutely essential that we make a commitment to AI inclusion, otherwise the technologies and tools risk entrenching already existing inequities. And similarly to digital inclusion, this suggests the digital infrastructure, subscriptions, education and programs provided to the public through public libraries and to students through school, VET and university libraries will play an important role in supporting AI inclusion.

AI Literacy

One of the most critical components of AI inclusion is ability – or the need to be AI literate.[3] This is not to say that all Australians need to be experts in or creators of AI tools. However with the increasing integration of AI tools into our lives, from search engines to social media, Australians across all ages and regions need the skills to confidently and competently engage with AI tools and AI enhanced products.

Like all literacies, AI literacy builds on foundational literacies, including digital, media and information literacy. Unfortunately, there are already substantial disparities in people's literacy ability. For example, while 30% of Australian adults have low media literacy, this jumps to 41% of adults living in regional Australia and 75% of those aged over 75.[4]

Figure 1: Level of media literacy[5]



There are early indications that AI will only deepen existing literacy gaps. For example, the Digital Lives of Australians 2024 report released in May 2024 reports a 27 percentage point knowledge gap between older (50+) and younger Australians when asked if they knew a little about AI technologies.[6] These

[2] National and State Libraries Australasia (2023) *Australian public libraries statistical report 2021-2022* accessed from https://www.nsla.org.au/wp-content/uploads/PLS-2021-22-final.pdf

[3] The International Federation of Library Associations and Institutions (IFLA) suggests that AI literacy can be conceptualised as entailing the following elements: a basic understanding of how AI and machine learning (ML) work, their underlying logic and their limitations; understanding the potential societal impacts of AI, especially in the area of human rights; personal data management skills; and Media and Information literacy.
See International Federation of Library Associations and Institutions (2020) IFLA Statement on Libraries and Artificial Intelligence, p. 11. https://repository.ifla.org/handle/123456789/1646

[4] Notley, T., Chambers, S., Park, S., Dezuanni, M. 2021, Adult Media Literacy in Australia: Attitudes, Experiences and Needs. Western Sydney University, Queensland University of Technology and University of Canberra

[5] Ibid

[6] AuDA (2024) Digital Lives of Australian Report 2024 accessed: Digital Lives of Australians 2024 | auDA

cohorts are often cohorts who may be able to benefit significantly from AI assisted technologies. And for all Australians, as AI is increasingly embedded into both commercial and official processes and applications, there will not be an ability to avoid AI, even if people choose not to engage with specific generative AI tools.

While there is a particularly pressing need for literacy, including AI literacy, support for those outside the formal education system, there are also challenges within schools. Teacher librarians in schools have responsibility for whole school information literacy programs with a focus on the Australian Curriculum 'General Capabilities' of critical and creative thinking, digital literacy, ethical understanding, intercultural understanding, literacy, numeracy, and personal and social capability.[7] The decline, particularly prevalent in public schools in some states and territories, of qualified school library staff, especially teacher librarians, places students in these schools at risk of significant disadvantage in obtaining the information and media literacy skills they need to successfully achieve AI literacy.

Measures to improve Australians' AI inclusion

For Australia to benefit from AI, we need to have high levels of AI inclusion across the population. Libraries, already the go to resource for access and education, have a significant role to play, and can draw from our depth of experience with digital, information and media literacy provision. Upskilling library staff in AI and successful ways to support the public with AI skills, is a cost-effective way to support students and the general public across all regions of Australia.

ALIA has had previous positive experiences working directly with researchers to examine needs, develop evidence-based approaches and apply these in a library setting and evaluate outcomes. An example pilot program with researchers from the University of Canberra led to the development of a library-focused media literacy short course targeted at the skills that library staff needed to support and teach media literacy with library users. The course evaluations showed that 94% of participants developed new skills sets and would recommend the course to colleagues.[8]

ALIA is also a partner in the ARC funded *Addressing Misinformation through Media Literacy through Cultural Institutions* and has recently started another pilot research program with UTS examining how generative AI tools affect library users seeking information. This project will develop a range of resources including a library curriculum and public exhibition exploring the findings. Government support to roll out these programs at a national level would support Australians with critical information and media literacy skills throughout life.

Recommendations:

1. That the government work with ALIA to fund the development and roll-out of training for library staff addressing AI literacy and pedagogy to support the community to be AI literate.
2. That the government funds the Australian Library and Information Association to work with researchers to update and expand evidence-based media literacy programs and fund the roll-out across public libraries in Australia.

Managing rights and interests in inputs and outputs

ALIA would like to express our thanks for the recent increase of funding for the Attorney-General's Department to support their work on Copyright and AI. This is a substantial area of work, and the additional resourcing is welcome. ALIA is pleased to contribute as part of the Copyright and AI Reference Group Steering Committee and looks forward to the work to come.

[7] Australian Curriculum (n.d.) General Capabilities 9.0 Digital Literacy. https://v9.australiancurriculum.edu.au/f-10-curriculum/general-capabilities/digital-literacy?element=0&subelement=0

[8] Park, S., Walsh, B. & Su, J. (2023). Libraries and Media Literacy Education. Canberra: News & Media Research Centre

ALIA also draws the committee's attention to the limitations of copyright in dealing with the issues from AI, specifically generative AI tools. With copyright's focus on legal ownership, it is a blunt tool that overlooks other interests in materials. This is a particular challenge when the creators or other interest holders in works have no control and receive no profit from subsequent use of a work - for example licensing as an input for large language models. The specific concerns in this matter relating to First Nations materials are examined in more depth below.

Notably, in the recent announcements of licensing deals, whether they be with news media companies or social media platforms, there has not necessarily been clear, or any, flow through of remuneration to the original creators. There is also nothing to protect creators, existing and emerging, from the risk of displacement due to generative AI outputs. This displacement risk is likely to increase as more high-quality data sets are licensed for use, and higher quality, more reliable outputs generated. As a sector that supports, and relies on, our writers and other creators, this is of serious concern for ALIA. We would suggest that for some highly impacted professions, such as writers, the committee may consider whether the likely rate of change is such that an industry transition arrangement or supports could be considered.

Copyright as the primary tool for control and access to inputs has challenges in the research space. The copyright for scholarly articles for instance is often not held by the academic authors, or by the universities and governments who funded the research. These papers are some of the richest sources of data for future scientific breakthroughs, and there are strong moral, economic and security arguments that access and use of these should not be entirely in the control of foreign commercial companies. Going forwards, the capabilities of AI reinforce the societal advantages of open access publishing.[9]

Finally, we draw the committee's attention to the significant issue of the intellectual property status of generative AI outputs. As the committee will be aware, thousands of outputs are being generated every day, and generative AI is increasingly integrated into routine business correspondence and reports, and even artistic items. As the repositories of substantial collections of publications and other materials, libraries are not currently in a position to identify AI generated or assisted works and are reliant on the depositors to provide information. As such, their copyright status will, in all practical ways, be that of a human authored work, even if that should not be the case under current copyright law. This obviously raises both practical and policy questions. On a practical level, what transparency measures could be put in place to identify AI generated content or require its disclosure? On a policy level, what status should outputs have, potentially considering amongst other aspects, the increased impact of displacement on creators if generative outputs are granted copyright protection, in law or in practice.

First Nations

A particularly significant concern around training data and generative AI output is in relation to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples' content. Colonialism and forced dispossession have systematically denied Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people full control over their own voices, knowledge and information for more than 200 years. Recent movements, including around Indigenous data sovereignty and Right of Reply[10] are slowly redressing past injustices, but there is a long way to go. The library sector is committed to reconciliation and working to support First Nations led processes to address injustices and ensure ethical and respectful progress. Guidelines and protocols, such as the ATSILIRN protocols,[11]

[9] Open Access Australasia (2023) Inquiry into the use of generative AI in the Australian education system. Submission 38. https://www.aph.gov.au/Parliamentary_Business/Committees/House/Employment_Education_and_Training/AIineducation/Submissions

[10] Indigenous Archives Collective (n.d.) Indigenous Archives Collective position statement on the Right of Reply to Indigenous knowledges and information held in archives. https://indigenousarchives.net/indigenous-archives-collective-positionstatement-on-the-right-of-reply-to-indigenous-knowledges-and-information-held-in-archives/

[11] ATSILIRN (2012) ATSILIRN Protocols. https://atsilirn.aiatsis.gov.au/protocols.php. See also Murphy, C. (2023) Elevating and Respecting Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander knowledges and perspectives in UQ Special and Research Collections. https://espace.library.uq.edu.au/view/UQ:ff03c00

Indigenous Cultural and Intellectual Property (ICIP) protocols,[12] description guidelines,[13] and referencing guidelines[14] support libraries and information services in the respectful handling and use of First Nations content. These guidelines emphasise respect, self-determination, cultural protocols and community consultation. They acknowledge ICIP, and the access limitations that need to be applied to some content, for example secret or sacred content.

There is a legitimate concern that the process of scraping materials from the internet, or from large licenced collections, and using them to train large language models (LLMs) does not respect these principles. There is further concern that the data that is collected will contain historical biases that are detrimental to First Nations peoples, noting that the majority of published First Nation historical content was written about, not by, First Nations people. There are also serious concerns about appropriation of First Nations stories and voices. Already generative AI tools will respond to prompts requesting First Nations content that no tools have standing to tell.

In raising these concerns it must be noted that due to the historical dispossession of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders from their culture, the copyright in the majority of historical works by or about Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people is not held by the creators, but often by non-Indigenous people and institutions. And while we congratulate the government on the continued work on the standalone ICIP right, there is currently very limited (or no) legal protection for First Nations interests in collections where the copyright is held elsewhere. The potential misuse and appropriation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders people is an urgent issue, and one that cannot be left as an intellectual property or copyright issue, even though it must be considered also in these discussions.

Recommendation:

3. That Federal, state and territory governments prioritise consulting with First Nations people and organisations with expertise in matters of information governance, ICIP, and cultural collections, to understand the concerns and actions required in the adoption of generative AI.

[12] For example, Queensland Department of Education (2022) Indigenous Cultural and Intellectual Property Protocol for the teaching of Aboriginal languages and Torres Strait Islander languages in Queensland State Schools. https://education.qld.gov.au/student/Documents/icip-protocol.pdf See also NSLA (2023) Position statement: Indigenous Cultural and Intellectual Property (ICIP). https://www.nsla.org.au/resources/indigenous-cultural-and-intellectual-property-icip/

[13] Raven, T (2023) Guidelines for First Nations Collection Description accessed: https://nla.gov.au/anbd.bib-an000075332809

[14] CAVAL & Indigenous Archives Collective Indigenous Archives Collective; Faulkhead, S, Thorpe, K, Sentance, N, Booker, L, & R Barrowcliffe (2023) Referencing Toolkit. Indigenous Referencing Guidance for Indigenous Knowledges. https://members.caval.edu.au/indigenous-referencing-guidance