ALIA submission in response to the Australian Government Inquiry into the UN Sustainable Development Goals

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1. About us

The Australian Library and Information Association (ALIA) is the professional organisation and peak body 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. We represent school, public, academic, research, corporate, law, health, government, National, State and Territory libraries and the people who staff them.

2. Libraries and the SDG

We welcome this opportunity to contribute to the Senate Inquiry into the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDG).

Libraries have been involved with the SDG from the earliest stages of their negotiation. IFLA (the International Federation for Library Associations and Institutions) lobbied hard at the international level for public access to information to be incorporated into the targets for the SDG. Having successfully achieved this objective, IFLA has set out the role of libraries in the 2030 Agenda and created valuable resources for its members[1].

As a member of IFLA, the Australian Library and Information Association (ALIA) has been an active participant in IFLA's International Advocacy Programme. We have been working to assist Australian library and information professionals and their organisations to be part of this international drive for greater social equality, improved economic prosperity and a more sustainable environmental approach.

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[1] https://www.ifla.org/libraries-development

- We have been part of the conversation with the Australian Government Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT) since 2015.
- In 2016, we connected peak bodies for galleries, libraries, archives, museums, historical societies and other collecting institutions with our DFAT colleagues and, in March 2017, we hosted a briefing session on the SDGs for Professions Australia members at ALIA House.
- At our AGM in May 2017, ALIA Members agreed to include an additional Object in our Constitution, incorporating the principles of the United Nations Universal Declaration of Human Rights Article 19 and the 2030 Sustainable Development Goals.
- ALIA participated in the second Australian Sustainable Development Goals Summit, in Melbourne on 13 March 2018.
- We will be hosting a one-day Summit on the SDGs for library and information professionals in the Asia-Pacific region, to be held alongside the ALIA Asia-Pacific Library and Information Conference on the Gold Coast, on 29 July 2018.

We have made a number of presentations about the SDG to colleagues in libraries, cultural institutions and humanities research.

2. Understanding and awareness of the SDG

ALIA has been working to raise awareness of the role libraries can play in the SDG, as described above. We see the role of libraries falling under three headings:

1. Our facilities, programs and services help deliver against a number of goals and targets, including:

   Goal 1: universal literacy to break the cycle of poverty and disadvantage
   Goal 3: providing people with the information they need to stay healthy
   Goal 4: quality education through formal and informal learning
   Goal 5: safe meeting places and programs for women and girls
   Goal 8: help for job seekers and business start ups
   Goal 9: digital inclusion activities supporting the Smart Cities agenda
   Goal 10: outreach services that make learning possible for everyone
   Goal 11: preserving the nation's cultural heritage
   Goal 16: public access to information and cybersafety initiatives
   Goal 17: national and international partnerships to achieve a better future

2. Our work provides examples of success – data and statistics – which can be used as part of Australia's reporting.

   Our report *Australian libraries support the Sustainable Development Goals,* featuring case studies of how libraries contribute, is included with our submission.

3. We can help communicate the 2030 Agenda to a wide audience.

   Libraries can play an important role in communicating the SDG to the wider Australian community. Through our network of public libraries, we have more than

1600 "shop windows" in communities across metro, regional and remote parts of Australia. Our reach is even greater when we consider school, academic, special, National, State and Territory libraries.

As the peak body for libraries, ALIA is providing the awareness, encouragement and resources to enable Australian libraries to incorporate the SDG in their own strategic plans and policy statements.

3. Potential costs, benefits and opportunities

Our *Australian libraries support the Sustainable Development Goals* report demonstrates how effectively libraries are already supporting the SDG within core funding.

As we progress along the 2015-2030 timeline, we anticipate all three levels of government will set stretch targets to take us beyond what we are currently doing, into new areas of service delivery. For example, civic buildings, including libraries, will be aiming for "net zero carbon"; new technologies will require us to develop new skills and find new ways of working; increased SDG-related expectations from our communities will put greater pressure on already tight budgets.

Libraries are ready for the challenge, but funding bodies will need to recognise where additional investment is required to make change possible and effective.

4. Monitoring and communicating performance

For this to be effective and engaging at a community level, targets need to be simple, meaningful, easy to measure and visible.

Libraries are well placed to make performance measures visible in communities, for example through library displays, public meetings, reports on our websites and via our social media presence.

5. Best practice in other countries

Libraries in Australia have been recognised by our peers around the world for demonstrating best practice in how we have embraced the SDG and how we are using the goals to provide a framework for our activities.

While we can always learn from others, we are proud of the leadership Australian libraries have shown on the international stage.

6. Recommendation

We recommend that the importance of libraries in delivering the SDG be acknowledged within the committee's report, opening the way for further partnerships with government, academia and civil society, to progress the 2030 Agenda.

We also ask the Foreign Affairs, Defence and Trade Committee to consider and comment on the potential for libraries to be SDG awareness and information hubs, promoting the global goals to people of all ages, in communities across the nation.

Australia has more than 1500 public library branches and mobile libraries, with 9.3 million registered members and more than 113 million customer visits each year. In addition, we have some 9,000 school libraries, 450 university and TAFE libraries, 2100 special libraries, and flagship National, State and Territory Libraries. The National Library of Australia's Trove platform is the fourth most visited Australian Government website.

This level of engagement with people living in Australia gives us tremendous reach as a trusted information source, and is an excellent fit with the aims of the SDG.