



Submission in response to the Australian Government Foreign Policy White Paper

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1. About us

ALIA

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

The Australian library sector is considered an exemplar of best practice in library and information education, standards and service delivery, by colleagues around the world. Our development of data management skills; introduction of maker spaces, coding and robotics; creation of iconic library buildings and investment in innovative digital technologies have established us as global leaders.

Our members are highly engaged at an international level and active in international organisations dealing with standards, research and education. We are members of the International Federation of Library Associations (IFLA), based in The Hague, and more than 50 Australian library and information professionals attend the IFLA World Library and Information Congress each year. ALIA Members are active on many of the IFLA committees and two of our former ALIA Presidents sit on the IFLA governing board.

IFLA has Formal Associate Relations with UNESCO, observer status with the United Nations, associate status with the International Council of Scientific Unions (ICSU) and observer status with the World Intellectual Property Organization (WIPO), the International Organization for Standardization (ISO) and the World Trade Organization (WTO).

At the regional level, ALIA has a Memorandum of Understanding with the Library Association of Singapore and LIANZA (our equivalent organisation in New Zealand). This will see the first Asia Pacific Library and Information Conference held on the Gold Coast in July/August 2018.

2. Introduction

We welcome this opportunity to respond to the Australian Government's Foreign Policy White Paper. While libraries may not be front of mind for policy makers in this area, we have a role to play in a number of areas:

- Australia's contribution to the UN Sustainable Development Goals
- Advice about the impact of trade agreements on domestic copyright
- Involvement in research and data initiatives to support Australia's knowledge economy
- Promotion of Australia's creative industries, especially in the area of literature
- Cultural understanding within our region and internationally

3. Responses to the key issues

01 Australia's foreign policy needs to be grounded in a clear-eyed assessment of our national interests.

Question: How should our values underpin Australia's foreign policy?

Our answer: Australia's strategy relating to the UN Sustainable Development Goals should be closely aligned with our foreign policy.

As one of the nations that has adopted the UN Sustainable Development Goals to end poverty, protect the planet, and ensure prosperity for all, Australia needs to ensure that our foreign policy is aligned with the 17 goals and related targets.¹

ALIA is already working with DFAT to ensure that libraries play their part in delivering targets around universal literacy, access to information and to technology, and that this work generates the data and narrative required for the Australian Government to report its progress to the UN.

02 Australia has diverse interests that span the globe.

Question: How should we deepen and diversify key relationships?

Our answer: Include arts, culture and heritage as an element of international agreements.

International relationships begin with trade and economic outcomes, but they can be deepened and diversified through improved understanding of each other's arts, culture and heritage. We would point to the example of the 2015 Comprehensive Strategic Partnership

¹ <http://www.un.org/sustainabledevelopment/sustainable-development-goals/>

with Singapore, which provided the context within which we were able to develop a three-way partnership with NZ.

From the DFAT website²: “Australia and Singapore have agreed to work with New Zealand to promote the library and information sector (LIS) across the three countries. On 12 October 2016, the Australian Library and Information Association (ALIA), the Library Association of Singapore (LAS) and the Library and Information Association of New Zealand Aotearoa (LIANZA) signed a memorandum of understanding to promote an innovation agenda by making information in all its forms accessible to some 20 million library users.”

04 Australia needs to be ambitious in grasping economic opportunities.

Question: How can we ensure Australia is positioned to take advantage of opportunities in the global economy?

Our answer: Invest in our research infrastructure and ensure ready access to information.

ALIA has contributed to the conversation around the development of the National Research Infrastructure Roadmap, including the proposal for a digital platform to make dispersed sets of data more readily available to humanities researchers.

In the 2015 international accord on *Open Data in a Big Data World*, the International Council for Science, InterAcademy Partnership, The World Academy of Sciences and the International Social Science Council, representing the global scientific community, referred directly to libraries as having “a responsibility for the development and provision of services and technical standards for data to ensure that data are available to those who wish to use them and that data are accessible over the long term.”³ Australian library and information professionals play an important part in making data more accessible and discoverable for science and humanities researchers, fuelling innovation in the public and private sector.

06 Australia uses a range of assets and capabilities to pursue our international interests.

Question: How can Government work more effectively with non-government sectors, including business, universities and NGOs to advance Australia's interests?

Our answer: Include the GLAM⁴ sector in considerations of international relationships; leverage digital access to Australian collections.

As stated earlier, international agreements are rarely built on the basis of cultural relationships, but links between our galleries, libraries, archives and museums can strengthen political bonds and enhance citizen engagement.

² <http://dfat.gov.au/geo/singapore/Pages/singapore-country-brief.aspx>

³ <http://www.icsu.org/science-international/accord/open-data-in-a-big-data-world-short>

⁴ Galleries Libraries Archives Museums (GLAM)

Digital access to Australian collections, notably through the National Library of Australia's Trove platform⁵, ensures that our nation's content is widely available. Digital access helps promote our culture and heritage and ensures that Australian creators are heard.

4. In summary

Libraries and other cultural institutions are well placed to contribute to the Australian Government Foreign Policy discussion.

We would like to highlight libraries' role in terms of innovation, relationship building and economic outcomes – making data accessible to researchers and helping to support knowledge-based industries; our commitment to supporting Australia's reporting against the UN Sustainable Development Goals, and our desire to see arts, culture and heritage recognised in future international agreements.

⁵ <http://trove.nla.gov.au/>