Submission in response to the Australian Human Rights Commission *Human Rights and Technology Issues Paper*

27 September, 2018

1. About us

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.

Our members include school, academic, TAFE, special (government, law, corporate, health), State and Territory libraries, and, through the ALIA Australian Public Library Alliance, we represent the nation's 1600 public libraries.

Human rights and the free flow of information and ideas in the interests of all Australians are enshrined in the Objects of the Australian Library and Information Association (ALIA).

Objects of the Association

1. To promote the free flow of information and ideas in the interest of all Australians and a thriving culture, economy, environment and democracy.
2. To promote and improve the services provided by all kinds of library and information agencies.
3. To ensure the high standard of personnel engaged in information provision and foster their professional interests and aspirations.
4. To represent the interests of Members to governments, other organisations and the community.
5. To encourage people to contribute to the improvement of library and information services through support and membership of the Association.
6. To endorse the principles of the United Nations Universal Declaration of Human Rights – Article 19 and the 2030 Sustainable Development Goals in response to the many challenges faced by the world today and into the future.

ALIA Australian Public Library Alliance

The ALIA Australian Public Library Alliance advises the ALIA Board of Directors about matters relating to public libraries and facilitates collaboration in the public library sector. Members of Alliance are representatives from ALIA, the state-based public library associations, territory libraries and Libraries Tasmania.

Australia's public library network

Australia has more than 1600 central, branch and mobile libraries, with 9.3 million registered members and more than 113 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 2015-2016, the number of public access internet devices provided by public libraries nationally was 12,806, an increase of 28.4% on the number in 2010-2011.[1]

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.

Public libraries provide:

- Support for safe online experiences
- High speed broadband internet connection in a safe, friendly community space.
- PC terminals, tablets and other devices (including technology petting zoos)
- Spaces for exploring innovative digital technologies
- Training and informal help for people to develop digital literacy skills
- Relevant and engaging content.

2. Issues

ALIA has a strong interest in a number of the topics touched on by the *Human Rights and Technology Issues Paper*:

2.1 Access
Public libraries have made a significant investment in digital technologies with the aim of improving access for people who might otherwise be left behind. This has resulted in nearly 13,000 public access computers[2], high speed broadband internet access, free WiFi, computer software, maker spaces, media labs, coding and robotics programs, digital inclusion classes and resources.

2.2 Equity
Libraries are actively involved with the implementation of the UN Sustainable Development Goals, and Goal 16 includes the specific target relating to public access to information. ALIA has published a report on the SDGs[3] and made a submission to the Senate Inquiry[4].

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[1] https://www.nsla.org.au/sites/default/files/documents/nsla.aust-pub-lib-stats_2015-16.pdf
[2] https://www.nsla.org.au/sites/default/files/documents/nsla.aust-pub-lib-stats_2015-16.pdf
[3] https://www.alia.org.au/sites/default/files/Sustainable%20Development%20Goals%20report_screen.pdf
[4]
https://www.aph.gov.au/Parliamentary_Business/Committees/Senate/Foreign_Affairs_Defence_and_Trade/SDGs/Submissions Submission #9

- Public libraries in New South Wales have been successfully delivering legal information services to their communities for over 25 years, in partnership with the Legal Information Access Centre (LIAC), located at the State Library of New South Wales. The focus of the service is on access to information in plain English. LIAC is not only a library service provider, but also a publisher, producing legal information that can be understood by non-lawyers. LIAC also provides training for library staff to help build their confidence in dealing with legal information enquiries – with the emphasis on information rather than opinions or advice. Other stakeholders in the program include Legal Aid New South Wales, Law Access, Courts and Tribunal Services, the Law and Justice Foundation and community legal centres.

2.3 Digital inclusion

As described in the Australian Digital Inclusion Index (ADII) 2018[5], digital inclusion in Australia is improving, but gaps between digitally included and excluded Australians are substantial and widening. The ACT has the highest ADII score at 66.4, while South Australia has the lowest at 57.9. The Index is built on three measures – access, affordability and digital skills, all of which are addressed through libraries.

The Australian Government has recognised the challenges of equity of access to information and services delivered online, and efforts are being made through libraries to address disadvantage and target groups who are less likely to be digitally engaged.

- Be Connected is a substantial initiative designed to promote digital literacy for older Australians. ALIA is working with the Department of Social Services, the Office of the eSafety Commissioner, the Be Connected National Network Manager (the Good Things Foundation), and libraries across Australia to ensure that libraries are taking advantage of $20 million-worth of Be Connected grants to support digital inclusion programs in local communities.

- The State Library of Queensland has introduced the Deadly Digital Communities program, which encourages Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples to dream big through digital literacy to create and unlock new opportunities and new possibilities for themselves and their community. The program provides community-based digital literacy and technology training over two years to 26 remote and regional Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities in Queensland. Participants will learn digital skills from sending an email, to using social media, to paying bills online, to promoting a new business idea and more.

2.4 Privacy and online safety

Australian public libraries handle more than 8.3million requests each year[6], often relating to government websites and online forms. Examples of activities relating to privacy and online safety:

- From September-November 2018, libraries will be distributing more than 65,000 My Health Record packs published by the Australian Government Digital Health Agency,

[5] https://digitalinclusionindex.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2018/08/Australian-digital-inclusion-index-2018.pdf
[6] https://www.nsla.org.au/sites/default/files/documents/nsla.aust-pub-lib-stats_2015-16.pdf

providing people with the information they seek about the record itself, opting out and privacy settings.

- Launched in 2012, eSmart Libraries is an $8 million, multi-year partnership between the Alannah and Madeline Foundation, Telstra Foundation and Australian public libraries. The program has been rolled out across Australia, in more than 1,000 locations, ensuring libraries and library users develop the skills everyone needs for smart, safe and responsible use of technology.

2.5 Data

In the rapidly changing digital environment, library professionals are among the best-equipped to utilise new information technologies and to help their users discover, access and use data. Library and information professionals in academic, research and special libraries possess the skills to help shape open data projects, improving the quality of the metadata; increasing discoverability and usability; providing the repositories and platforms for data storage, and promoting access and reuse.

2.6 Digital citizenship

Public libraries are a communications channel, providing physical noticeboards, well-used websites and an active social media presence. At the same time, school libraries work with the next generation, teaching citizenship and information literacy.

- In 2016, the Australian Electoral Commission approached ALIA to manage a project running voter information sessions in areas with a high level of informal voting. The events took place in the weeks before the federal election. There were 115 sessions in 63 locations. They were run in English and nine other community languages, often as a partnership between the library and local community groups.
- In 2016, the Australian Bureau of Statistics partnered with LINC Tasmania to make the 2016 Census more accessible to those with low literacy or barriers to online access. The extensive network of LINCs (libraries) were places where Tasmanians could find help accessing the Census online or in paper form, or for additional support including literacy. The partnership demonstrated the library's role in promoting social inclusion and enabling and supporting digital citizenship in an increasingly digital world, while generating higher quality Census data for Tasmania.

Libraries are trusted places, promoting equity and freedom of access to information and resources. They provide a valuable platform for government communication and public education initiatives relating to new technologies and the issues that arise.

3. Responses to consultation questions

1. What types of technology raise particular human rights concerns? Which human rights are particularly implicated?

Libraries serve diverse communities and while new technologies of all kinds have brought significant benefits, they have also widened the digital divide.

From the library perspective, we are especially concerned with:

- Freedom of expression for authors and creators; freedom of access to information without censorship (Articles 18 and 19)
- Access to free education for all (Article 26)
- The right for people to participate in the cultural life of the community and for creators to benefit from their works (Article 27).

For example, in relation to these human rights, ALIA has advocated against ISP-level internet filters and promoted public education as the alternative to high level content restrictions. We have highlighted the role of libraries as places for informal learning and free courses to support digital inclusion, countering the risk of people being left behind. We have called for a copyright regime suited to the digital environment, where the rights of creators are recognised and balanced with the value of information being made available for the public good.

2. Noting that particular groups within the Australian community can experience new technology differently, what are the key issues regarding new technologies for these groups of people (such as children and young people; older people; women and girls; LGBTI people; people of culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds; Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples)?

We refer to the Australian Digital Inclusion Index, which measures inclusion in terms of access, affordability and digital skills. These are the three areas which libraries seek to address in order to promote equal opportunity.

4. Summary

ALIA welcomes the Australian Human Rights Commission' investigation into human rights and technology.

In our response, we seek to highlight the roles libraries play in supporting equitable access to new technologies and in helping people learn the skills they need to benefit from the digital age.

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