



FRIENDS OF LIBRARIES AUSTRALIA INCORPORATED



FOLA 2007

president's report

Friends of Libraries Australia

was launched as only the world's second such association, by its patron the Hon Justice Michael Kirby AC CMG, at a function in the State Library of Victoria on 9 December 1994. At the beginning of this, my second report as President of FOLA, I acknowledge the distinction and support that Justice Kirby has continued to lend FOLA during its first eleven years.

In one of his communications during the year to me, Justice Kirby observed that 'Friends of Libraries Australia is needed now more than ever before', a fair reflection of the challenges to be addressed by all of those many in Australia who believe that its libraries are fundamental markers of a civilized, literate, educated, informed and democratic nation.

During the year FOLA continued to demonstrate that, like many Friends groups themselves, it is helping to make a difference in the way libraries are perceived and supported.

Highlights of the year included:

- FOLA's third annual Report to the Nation in its five year program focused on issues critical to the development of public libraries to meet the needs of all in Australia. *Supporting students: the contribution of Australia's public libraries* was launched at FOLA's annual general meeting hosted by the Friends of Balmain Library NSW on 28 August 2006. This report, which was sent to a wide range of governmental and other agencies, emphasizes the contribution which public libraries already make to school education in Australia, and identifies their potential to do much more if funded and at a level consistent with Andrew Carnegie's 1904 assertion that 'If it is right that schools should be maintained by the whole community for the well being of the whole, it is right also that libraries should be so maintained.' During the year FOLA's national committee endorsed the theme for its fourth Report to the Nation, with the title *Looking ever forward: Australia's public libraries serving children and young people*. FOLA's Reports to the

“ If it is right that schools should be maintained by the whole community for the well being of the whole, it is right also that libraries should be so maintained. ”



Nation involve surveying all public libraries for information on their capacity to meet user needs, and provide the only national opportunity for their voice on specific issues to be heard by all levels of government.

- content enhancement of the website, and feedback that current and prospective Friends of Libraries groups are finding it and the new edition of the *Friends of Libraries resource book*, very useful.
- a review of FOLA's strategic plan, generously facilitated by Dr Angela Bridgland, University Librarian of the University of Melbourne.
- an ever increasing number of enquiries for advice from current and prospective Friends groups to the Executive Director, and requests to the President to speak at public and other meetings organised by Friends groups.
- the willingness of several valued sponsors to commit themselves to ongoing funding of FOLA to enable it to plan the extension of its activities towards better library funding.
- the initiation of two national annual awards to highlight the unique 'cradle to grave' remit of public libraries, improve awareness of FOLA by public library managers, feature public library excellence, and recognise two outstanding contributors to Friends of Libraries and FOLA. These awards are the Eric Flynn Award for Library Services for Older Adults and the Peter McInnes Award for Library Services for Children and Young Adults.
- a decision of the national committee to refocus FOLA's primary vision as *Better, more accessible, libraries for all in Australia*. This vision statement reflects that Australia now has a nationwide public library service, but that it must invest well beyond the current meagre 8c per Australian per day if public libraries are to achieve their full literacy, lifelong learning, life quality and social capital potential.

In specifying the need for investment in them, the 1947 surveyor of the then generally abysmal condition of public libraries, British Librarian Lionel McColvin, asserted that 'Better libraries for Australia won't just happen...the few must lead, must fight, must persist'.

Fortunately the few did lead, fight and persist and the 12 million Australian children and adults who now use and benefit from their public libraries are mostly

unaware of the debt they owe to those few. Similarly, they remain largely unaware of how poorly their libraries are still often funded, of developments and investment in modern libraries in Australia and overseas, and of how much more their libraries could do if funded properly. It therefore remains for the increasing, but still relatively few, Friends of Libraries groups supported by FOLA, to persist in informing and educating those 12 million people and library funding decision makers of the now demonstrable very high return on investment in libraries, and particularly public libraries. This is a major leadership role for FOLA. A specific issue which FOLA will be pursuing in the year ahead is fuller recognition by the library professional bodies of FOLA as the only national voice of library users. These bodies are now commencing formal discussions about how their collective voice can be used to improve local, state and federal awareness of the value of improving the nation's investment in its libraries.

In my previous report I observed that FOLA and Friends of Libraries Groups represent what is best about Australia – the willingness of volunteers to give of themselves and their resources for the public good. This is certainly true of members of FOLA's national committee, who receive no payment for their services or reimbursement for their travel and accommodation costs to attend its meetings. I therefore again express my appreciation of their contribution and collegiality, and especially thank FOLA's honorary Executive Director Daniel Ferguson for his unstinting contribution to FOLA's endeavours during the year.

I also thank the Friends of Balmain Library NSW for kindly hosting FOLA's 2006 annual general meeting.

— **Dr Alan Bundy AM**
President

