



FOLA 2009

PRESIDENT'S REPORT

Friends of Libraries Australia

was launched, as then only the second such national association in the world, 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 fourth report as FOLA President, in a year which saw his retirement from the High Court of Australia, I again acknowledge the distinction and support that the Hon Michael Kirby continues to lend FOLA.

The year past saw FOLA – as the national voice of the 60 per cent of Australians of all ages who use and value their public libraries – extend its focus on advocacy towards its vision of Better, more accessible, libraries for all in Australia. One manifestation of this was its support of the first Australian Public Libraries Summit held in Canberra on 16 July 2009, attended by its Executive Director Daniel Ferguson. FOLA was the only library body directly representing library users at the Summit, which itself derived from a proposal by FOLA made in December 2007 at a meeting with the Australian Library and Information Association, the subsequent convener of the Summit. The Summit promoted a greater awareness of the reach, achievements, limitations, and of the poor funding of Australia's public library system by state governments in particular. It also showed that much work remains to be done to achieve a national developmental and funding framework for Australia's public library system endorsed by all of the three levels of Australian government.

Other features of the year included

- numerous enquiries for advice, including from overseas, about the development of Friends of Libraries groups.
- continuing requests to the President and Executive Director to speak at public and other meetings organised by Friends of Libraries.
- the fifth in a series of FOLA Reports to the Nation which emphasise the scope of the responsibilities and achievements of Australia's public library system. A nation reading for life: the challenge for Australia's public libraries (available at www.foia.org.au) was launched at FOLA's annual general meeting in Warragul, Victoria on 10 September 2008. It emphasises the great importance of reading to people in society and to Australia as a democracy; the contribution which public libraries can make to both; and the need for better national and local policy and funding contexts for them to do so.

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- further growth in the scope and use of the FOLA website as a major national website about public libraries and the importance of local practical and advocacy support for them by active Friends of Libraries groups.
- a high level of entries for FOLA's two annual awards. The third Eric Flynn Award for Library Services for Older Adults went to the Campaspe Regional Library in Victoria, and the second Peter McInnes Award for Library Services for Children and Young Adults to the Hurstville City Library in NSW.
- increasing correspondence with, and submissions to, governmental agencies about public library issues. As one example, FOLA made a submission to the Australian Productivity Commission's Contribution of the not for profit sector study. This submission (available at www.fola.org.au) provided evidence of the very high return on investment in public libraries.
- the emphasis in Australian Government infrastructure stimulus funding to local government on much-needed investment in new and rebuilt public libraries. This is something about which, evidently to some effect, FOLA alone has made three annual submissions to the Australian Treasury.



The focus of FOLA's endeavours in the coming year will continue to be on its role as the national advocacy voice of the 12 million library users and that further 13 per cent of the Australian population which would use them if they were more accessible, and on encouraging Friends of Libraries groups as supporters and advocates for better public libraries for all in their communities. Among the initiatives to this end will be

- strong promotion of a national policy and funding framework for Australia's public library system.
- the development with FOLA sponsor Tutoring Australasia of an Australian public library advocacy website BetterLibraries.org.au.
- a third FOLA national annual award, for achievement in library advocacy. This will be named for Victorian public librarian, the late Colin Watson, an outstanding advocate for public libraries.
- a position paper promoting a greater awareness among Friends of Libraries groups of garnering the now retiring baby boomer generation to develop stronger volunteer and political support for their libraries.

Those Friends of Libraries groups represent what is best about Australia – volunteers giving of themselves, their time, resources and funds for the public good. As much is true of the members of FOLA's national committee. I therefore express my appreciation of their work, support and collegiality during the year, and in particular of the great contribution made to FOLA by its foundation Treasurer Mrs Margaret Broeks who stood down from the committee at the end of 2008. For his continuing invaluable contribution to FOLA during the year, is also thanked its honorary Executive Director and founder, Daniel Ferguson.

Appreciation is also extended to the Friends and management of the West Gippsland Regional Library, and the Baw Baw Shire in Victoria for hosting FOLA's 2008 annual general meeting. They are exemplars for every community in Australia – Friends of Libraries working with their councils and library managers towards better, more accessible, libraries for all.

Dr Alan Bundy AM
President