

President's Report 2010

Friends of Libraries Australia was launched, as only the second such national association in the world, by its patron the Hon Justice Michael Kirby AC CMG at the State Library of Victoria on 9 December 1994. At the beginning of this, my fifth report as FOLA President, and in the first year after 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 continue its focus on advocacy towards its vision of *Better, more accessible, libraries for all in Australia*, with an emphasis on the demonstrably needed increased investment in the nation's public library system. As a national voice of the 60 per cent of Australians who use and value their public libraries, FOLA has this focus in common with the professional national and state public library associations in Australia. It is therefore noteworthy that the year saw increasing shared endeavour by all of those associations towards a national vision and framework for the Australian public library system, following the FOLA initiated first Australian Public Libraries Summit convened by the Australian Library and Information Association (ALIA) and held in Canberra on 16 July 2009. For it is only with a systemic understanding and focusing of the latent strength of public support for Australia's public library system that advocacy for a better funded system will achieve worthwhile results.

Also noteworthy was the signing on 24 November 2009 of a partnership agreement between FOLA and ALIA, which includes ALIA's agreement to continue hosting the FOLA website.

Of the fact that there is a need for an organisation to support Friends of Libraries and through them the improvement of the Australian public library system, the year saw continuing evidence, including

- numerous enquiries for advice about the development and organisation of Friends of Libraries groups.
- continuing requests to the President and Executive Director to speak at workshops and public meetings organized by library managers or Friends of Libraries groups. These included workshops requested by the library managers of the large dynamic Geelong Regional Library, and the new world-class public library in Mt Gambier, South Australia.

Other features of the year included

- a restructuring of the FOLA website to enhance it 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.
- the award of the third Peter McInnes Award for Library Services for Children and Young Adults to the Oberon Library, NSW, with high commendations to Maitland Library, NSW, Mid Western Regional Council, NSW and Hobsons Bay Libraries, Victoria.
- the addition to FOLA's awards of the Colin Watson Award for Library Advocacy, which will be awarded for the first time in late 2010.
- a submission to the federal parliamentary inquiry into school libraries and teacher-librarians. This submission emphasized the importance school libraries and teacher-librarians, and the need for close collaboration between public libraries and schools in the literacy development, education and socialization of young people.
- continuing correspondence with a range of governments about public library funding issues. The most noteworthy of these was to the Premier of WA and relevant WA ministers about indicated funding cuts to that State's public library system. The outcome of the strong representation by FOLA, and by other associations, was a meaningful increase in funding, rather than a decrease. Also noteworthy was FOLA's strong response to user pay proposals for the library service of the large and fast-growing City of Tauranga in New Zealand. This was appreciated by the Friends of Tauranga Library, as New Zealand does not have a national association for Friends of Libraries.

The focus of FOLA's efforts in the coming year will continue to be on its role as a national advocacy voice of the 12 million public library users and that further 13 per cent of the Australian population which research shows would benefit from using public libraries if they were better-known and more accessible to them. It will in particular continue to foster Friends of Libraries groups as supporters and knowledgeable advocates for better public libraries for all in their communities. To these ends, it will

- continue to contribute to the iteration and implementation of a national vision and framework for the Australian public library system.
- publicise and support the planning for the ALIA-led 2012 National Year of Reading(NYR), a concept proposed in FOLA's 2008 Report to the Nation *A nation reading for life: the challenge for public libraries*, which is available at www.fola.org.au. NYR2012 has great potential to demonstrate to the Australian people and their governments the value of better investment in the capacity of school and public libraries to foster a literate and reading population of all ages.
- continue to support the annual information-sharing forum of Friends of Libraries groups in South Australia which has been held for several years under the aegis of Australia's oldest Friends of the Library group, that of the State Library of South Australia. Late 2010 will also see FOLA contributing to the first such forum outside of South Australia, to be held at the State Library of NSW.
- pursue with the Australian Library and Information Association enhanced cooperation, and in particular the development of national awards for excellence in new and rebuilt library buildings. These awards would recognize, and encourage more of, the large number of fine public library buildings now being constructed throughout Australia, in part because of some federal government funding for them.
- publish a position paper referred to in my 2009 annual report aimed to promote a greater awareness among Friends of Libraries groups of garnering the retiring baby boomer generation in their succession planning and to develop stronger volunteer and political support for their libraries.
- finally, an aim for the coming year will be to commence a review of succession options for FOLA to ensure that, beyond the contribution of its current longstanding office bearers, it can continue to contribute to better, more accessible, libraries for all in Australia.

It was heartening throughout the year to hear from Friends of Libraries, such as the long-established Friends of the Great Lakes Library in NSW and the Friends of the Stirling Library in SA, about their continuing vitality, innovations, and successes. Those Friends, as do all FOL groups, represent what is best about Australia – volunteers giving of themselves for the public good.

The same is true of FOLA's national committee. I therefore again state my appreciation of its members' work and collegiality during the year, and especially of the unstinting contribution over several years of retiring committee members Peter and Elaine Chippendale from Toowoomba. Daniel Ferguson, the inspiration behind the establishment of FOLA and its honorary Executive Director since 1994, is also thanked for his similarly unstinting contribution during the year.

Finally, appreciation is expressed to the Friends and management of the Port Macquarie Library in NSW for hosting in fine style on 27 August 2009 FOLA's 2009 annual general meeting. The event was a tangible reminder that what the community of Port Macquarie benefits greatly from – a fine library supported by active Friends – should be available to all communities throughout Australia.

Dr Alan Bundy AM
President