

Twelve million public library friends: worth an investment?

An information and issues paper for Australian public librarians on Friends of Libraries

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Legal axiom

Australia came late, large parts of it very late, to a recognition of the importance of investing in free local public libraries for all. One reason was the continued existence of the subscription libraries in mechanics' institutes or schools of arts. This was long after those 19th century institutions had slid into terminal decline. Another reason was the weakness of local government. A third reason was lack of leadership by state governments content to invest, often poorly, in the capital city state libraries, and to sometimes provide small subsidies to the mechanics' institute libraries. The first Friends of Library (FOL) group in Australia, the Friends of the State Library of South Australia, was established at a large public meeting in the Adelaide Town Hall on 25 July 1932. It was a response to state government funding of just 13s 6d — less than \$2 — to buy new books in that year.

As a consequence of such lack of support for public libraries the 1934 Munn-Pitt survey of Australian libraries, funded by the US Carnegie Corporation, could famously state

As a whole Australia was better provided with local libraries in 1880 than it is today. Almost every city and large town contains a decadent institute or school of arts, many of which give evidence of having had a former period of usefulness.

It is pathetic to observe the pride and complacency with which local committees exhibit wretched little institutes which have long since become 'cemeteries of old and forgotten books'.¹

Although most states had enacted legislation to address this situation within a few years of the Munn-Pitt report, in 1946 another surveyor of the Australian library scene, British librarian Lionel McColvin could see little progress. In a report commissioned by the federal government he felt it necessary to assert that 'Better library services for Australians won't just happen'. His next observation was that 'The few must lead, must fight, must persist'.²

It is because friends of libraries and a small number of library professionals did lead, fight and persist that Australia now ranks in the top public library nations, a status it did not have in 1956 when the US, UK, Denmark and New Zealand were identified as the leading public library nations.³ It is one of the little lauded major achievements of local and state governments that through public libraries, joint use libraries, and outreach services, almost every person in our vast island continent now has free and increasingly fast access to the total print and electronic resources of Australia's libraries. They also now have free internet access in most libraries.

State and local governments may contest their relative contributions to the funding of public libraries. However the reality is that the achievement of free public libraries for nearly all Australians derives since the 1950s from their partnership. The national government has made almost no direct contribution to public libraries, despite their important role for example in literacy development, which is now seen as a national issue. It is the prospect of loss of state government subsidy which has helped to stifle those who occasionally and shortsightedly raise the direct user pays issue. The only outcome of a subscription charge to borrow from a library is that it will be used less, when clearly for the benefit of an educated, literate, informed, recreated and connected community every effort should be made to ensure that a library is used more by more people. That partnership is a symbolic, infrastructure and funding partnership which largely explains why 99 per cent of Australians now have more or less direct access to a public library and through that to the nation's total library resources, and beyond. It also explains why Australia, with its large area and small and often sparsely distributed population has a greater evenness of provision, access and statewide public library cooperation than, for example, in the USA which still has rural areas in some states such as Iowa with no public libraries, and quite poor libraries in others.

Yet so much remains to be done in improving buildings, bookstocks, other resources, services, hours of opening, and particularly specialised library professional and other staff. Much progress has indeed been made in only the last 30 years, but a wealthy country like Australia really can do much better than the meagre 7c per Australian per day currently spent on public libraries. It is not unreasonable wishful thinking to aim for at least a doubling in real terms of expenditure on Australia's public libraries by 2010, from 7c per day to 14c per Australian per day. Consider that the ABC, with an audience less than one-third that of public libraries, costs about 14c per day now. This is not to suggest that the ABC does not return a great local and national return on investment, or that it does not need

better funding. However it does suggest that the low level of funding and the truly outstanding return on investment in Australia's public libraries needs to be much better understood by the community, its decision makers, library users, and by public librarians themselves.

Those laypersons referred to above were early friends of libraries who made the difference at critical times. It is their legacy of citizen advocacy for better libraries for all Australians which have been bequeathed to today's local Friends of Libraries, and Friends of Libraries Australia (FOLA).

The importance of partnership

It has been fairly stated that Australian public libraries, with their inadequate recognition and funding, are a victim of this country's complex three tiers of government, with their bureaucratic and political proclivity for buck passing of responsibility and cost shifting.

However the reality is that in all states except Tasmania, if a local authority chooses not to provide or contribute funding to a public library, unlike the UK, there is no requirement for it to do so. In that context it is really quite remarkable that only one local authority in Australia does not now support a public library. The primary responsibility for good public libraries lies with local government. It is thus local government which must improve, and lobby state governments to improve, the investment in what is far the most heavily used and valued community resource of this country. It is local government, and its state associations, which must continue to argue the case for state governments to reinstate their relative funding and infrastructure partnership with local government in the provision of public libraries. State governments need to continue to be taken to task for the sophistry that it is local government choosing to increase its funding to improve libraries, rather than state governments not increasing their funding in real terms, which has seen the ratio between local and state government funding slip greatly over the last two decades. State governments are subsidising public libraries as though they are still the book lending agencies of 50 years ago. It really is time they moved on, and recognised the many dimensions and needs of the modern public library. If one partner is contributing more to improve something of potential benefit to everyone in a state, that partnership must be a source of tension and unproductive outcomes. This is something to which at a local level the increasing numbers of joint use libraries in Australia are especially vulnerable.

A doubling in real terms of public library funding across Australia by 2010 will, however, largely need to be the aggregated outcome of improved funding by individual local authorities. This will require local informed and strategic advocacy for that improvement, complemented by consolidated pressure on state governments to honour their partnership obligations.

The return on investment

It is therefore salutary to consider the outcome of the current very modest investment by local and state governments in public libraries

- 547 independent services with 1,560 service points including mobile libraries, but not their stops. There are more public library outlets than McDonalds
- over 250 library buildings are being replaced or rebuilt between 2000-2006
- 9% of the static service points are joint use public libraries shared with educational institutions. This is the second highest percentage worldwide after Sweden with 40%. South Australia also has 40%
- the active public library membership represents 49% (56% median) of the population, although ABS estimates that 60% (12 million) use them. This is broadly comparable with other developed countries, the highest being Finland with 80% membership. Some public libraries in Australia also report memberships at this level

- 95% of Australians think public libraries should be publicly funded. Direct user pays to borrow from them is not a significant issue, although narrow-visioned ideologues may raise it from time to time to 'chill' consideration of funding libraries well
- over 100 million visits a year. Their buildings, including the state libraries, are by far the most trafficked public buildings in Australia. A public library open for the long hours that it should be, including Sundays, will be the most heavily used public building in a local authority area
- generally free public access to over 5,000 internet terminals
- largely through its public libraries, local government is by far the largest educational and cultural provider in Australia. This is something few in local government, local government associations and even fewer in formal education and the cultural community, recognise
- the return on investment in public libraries is between \$2.50 and \$7.00 for every dollar invested. No other public investment demonstrably returns a higher dividend.

This last assertion derives, in part, from the extensive research of Dr Glenn Holt of the St Louis Public Library over the last ten years. His findings are confirmed by two other recent US studies. A 2004 taxpayer study of the impact of public libraries in Florida found that

- Florida's public libraries return \$6.54 for every \$1.00 invested from all sources
- for every \$6,448 spent on public libraries from public funding, one job is created
- for every public dollar spent on them, gross regional product increases by \$9.08
- for every public dollar spent on them income increases by \$12.66

Another study, released in 2005, was conducted in South Carolina (SC). This found that

- the direct economic impact of all SC public library expenditures is \$80 million
- the existence of SC public libraries brings to the state from federal and other sources almost \$5million that it would not otherwise have
- the value of loans and use of library resources is \$102million pa
- the value of reference services is \$26million
- the total direct economic impact of the libraries is \$222million, while the actual cost of them to the state and local governments is \$77.5million. For every \$1 spent, the investment return is \$2.86
- the indirect impact of public library expenditures on South Carolina's economy (salaries, supplies, resources, construction etc) is \$126million. For every \$1 spent, the state receives \$1.62 of indirect economic impact
- the total direct and indirect return on investment for every \$1 spent on public libraries by the state and local governments is \$4.48—a return of 350%.⁴

The value of the public library to the community and the individual goes, of course, far beyond the economic and easily quantifiable. Qualitative international and Australian research is increasingly showing what they mean for social capital development, and to individual lives.⁵

One tool which is particularly helpful in demonstrating to decision makers the full value of the public library is *The library's contribution to your community: a resource manual for libraries to document their social and economic contribution to the local community*.⁶ This is a Canadian manual which has been reprinted for sale in Australia and New Zealand. Many libraries and some Friends of Libraries groups in both countries are now using it. To develop the manual the researchers interviewed elected members and administrators, reviewed the literature and sought input from librarians of different sized public libraries. It is useful because it

- identifies hard data to demonstrate your library's benefits — the type of information that decision makers want to evaluate the value of library services

- can be used by libraries of all sizes
- deals with all library services
- addresses a broad range of social and economic benefits
- has an extensive bibliography

The current investment in Australian public libraries

- the total local and state government investment in local public libraries is \$550 million pa, about 7c per Australian per day — the cost of just one book or cd or dvd pa. This is about 60% of the annual expenditure of just one large Australian university with 35,000 students. It is equivalent to only 1.6% of the total \$40 billion pa expenditure on formal education in Australia
- for what is invariably its most heavily used and most valued community provision, the individual local government annual investment ranges from less than 1% pa of rate revenue to over 7% in some parts of Australia. Percentages of total annual local government outlays are even less
- percentages of rate revenue allocated to their libraries or regional library corporations by country local authorities are generally less, sometimes very much less, than in urban areas. Those authorities who are smaller members of regional libraries tend to contribute very low amounts, as do those involved in joint use libraries. They are often getting their libraries ‘on the cheap’, with almost tokenistic contributions
- the public library subsidy by state governments as a percentage of state expenditure is very variable. NSW is by far the worst, followed by Victoria. There are no historical or demographic factors which convincingly justify these differences between the states, except in Tasmania where the state government provides almost 99% of the funding for its integrated statewide library system. The question must be asked by public librarians, Friends of Libraries and others advocating for better public libraries for all Australians, why is it so, and what is required to get the worst performing local government authorities and states to lift their game?

Percentage of state government expenditure on public libraries

New South Wales	0.039%
Queensland	0.173%
South Australia	0.261%
Tasmania	0.308%
Victoria	0.112%
Western Australia	0.130%

The NSW government now only contributes about 7% of the cost of local public libraries in NSW — not exactly a partnership. The other states, Tasmania excepted, range from about 14% to 28%.

The local government perspective

The fact that some local authorities already invest over 7% of their rates on their libraries also begs the question, if some can, and choose to do so, why do not the others? They are questions which demand a response because a minimum of 10% of rates should arguably be the target investment by any local authority.

The difference between a poorly staffed, housed, resourced and passive library service providing little more than a lending service, to one that is a proactive contributor to community development, engagement and social capital, may be as little a shift in rate revenue expenditure of 2% by a local authority, and a shift in state government annual expenditure of 0.25 of one percent. A doubling of

investment in local public libraries would still only result in about \$1100 million pa being spent on them. In national budgetary terms this is insignificant. However public libraries and their supporters do little individual and collective analysis of public library funding, which usually has no basis other than historical. Too often they accept the political and bureaucratic mantra that more funds are not available for their development. The reality is that governments of all complexions find money for what they can be persuaded is important, and libraries *are* important — 12 million users is the evidence. Some recognition of this is encouragingly manifest in the increased funding and new buildings which Australian public libraries have been achieving in recent years.

Yet very few public libraries, their users and friends, actually know what percentage of rate revenue and other council outlays they receive, or what is the rationale and basis for what they do receive. They therefore have no basis on which to argue for a progressive and strategic funding adjustment to enable them to deliver better for the community. This argument is not easy, particularly if a local authority's main aspiration is low rates, good roads and mediocrity in all things, and if a state government's apparent concern is to cost shift to local government. However a few facts, figures and benchmarks can sustain the argument. It is true that local government around Australia faces constant pressure to provide new and better services, and to accept cost shifts from the other levels of government. That is no excuse, however, for its library service not to be given the very highest funding priority, for the community, social and educational capital return on investment and other reasons explored in this paper. The possible exception is rural areas with declining populations and rates bases, where the level of state government support for public libraries becomes even more critical.

Libraries rate very highly

It can still come as a surprise to local authorities which increasingly engage in surveys of ratepayer and resident satisfaction, just how highly libraries rate. Therein lays one of the challenges facing public librarians — to ensure that all Australians, and especially those who make decisions on their behalf, are aware of what constitutes a modern public library service. Public libraries tend to be well used regardless of their quality, although they are always used more if they are good, as the opening of every new library building or a library open on Sunday demonstrates. People often do not know what constitutes a good public library, even if they have a sense that the library on which they depend is deficient. They thus do not know when they are being denied one. They certainly do not know how little, that meagre 7c per Australian per day, they pay for them. Even when users are dissatisfied with their libraries, they are notoriously difficult to persuade to complain to their local authority out of deference to the feelings of library staff, or for fear that the local authority might actually *reduce* library services and resources.

Increasing the investment

It is sometimes heard from local government officers and elected members — often males who are not regular direct library users themselves — that 'we know we need a new or a better library but rates would have to go up, and that would not be acceptable to ratepayers'. This may be a furry to chill the pressure for a new or improved library. The reality is that local government usually has the capacity to borrow without increasing rates significantly. Even if some rate increase is necessary the experience throughout Australia is that ratepayers will generally endorse it for such an outstanding community asset as a public library. A new library is very much more acceptable to ratepayers than a new civic and administration centre. This is a reason why a local authority may bundle a new library in with its major objective, a new civic and administration centre. Few ratepayers ever go near their civic and administration centre. Most do use, or their family members use, the public library. Those ratepayers and others will certainly vote with their feet when the new library is opened. A local authority also needs to listen to the voice of the total community, not just ratepayers. This includes residents and users of its libraries from outside of its area, all of whom indirectly contribute to local business and retailing income and local rates. How many local authorities in Australia, however, have a library advisory committee at all, or one with other than token community representation? Very few, is the answer. Unlike in New Zealand, and a recent example in West Gippsland, Australian local

government seems curiously disinclined to establish or promote such committees or groups, a disinclination which seems to be the antithesis of the grassroots democracy claimed for it. The void is increasingly being filled by Friends of Libraries as the voice of the community.

Selling a vision

Theodore Hesburg, the highly successful president of the US Notre Dame University, once observed that

The very essence of leadership is that you have to have a vision. It's got to be a vision you articulate profoundly on every occasion. You can't blow an uncertain trumpet.

This is an important message for public librarians because, despite the great and largely unsung work of public libraries across Australia, few national, state and local government decision makers recognise that in the age of information and lifelong learning, and social capital deficit, strong investment in public libraries is fundamental — not a soft option to be put aside when other fiscal needs loom.

Public libraries can never be overused. However, from poor locations, unattractive buildings, lack of space, lack of up to date and attractive resources, creaking technology, lack of professional and specialised staff, poor hours and restrictive and punitive policies, one could conclude that some local authorities are more concerned to minimise use of their libraries and thus, perhaps, their need for funds.

How many local authorities would be willing, for example, to place a conspicuous sign at the entrances to their libraries saying 'This library is proudly brought to you by the City of... in association with the State of...?' This is despite the fact that people are often unaware that their local library is provided by the local council and with state government support. If a library does not have marketing expertise within its staff (few have), does not have a marketing budget (few have), and is reluctant to market (some are) for fear of being overwhelmed by even heavier demand, this is a reflection on the local authority, its senior managers and elected members more than it is on the library manager.

Friends of Libraries

The great challenge for public librarians over the next few years is to achieve much better funding using the increasing wealth of quantitative and qualitative data on the return from investing in libraries. Their patchy record of success to date, individually and collectively at the local, state and national levels, suggests that they cannot do this alone. Nor should they attempt to do so.

There is a legal axiom that 'he or she who pleads their own cause has a fool for a lawyer'. Public librarians have, in general, been slow to recognise and heed this axiom. They have pleaded what is often perceived as 'their' cause, to limited effect, when of course it is not their cause — it is the cause of any civilized, educated and democratic community and its members.

The time has therefore surely come for public librarians to be more strategic about partnering locally and statewide with a resource of a dimension which other professions and agencies in society can only dream about. That resource is the 12 million Australians of all ages who use public libraries, and the remaining 7 million who may not use them but support their public funding. Are those 12 million Australian public library users worth a systematic investment of time, effort, funds and risk taking by public librarians in the quest to improve public libraries for all?

As long ago as 1988 Dr Christine Henderson, then manager of the Public Libraries Division in South Australia, answered that question by stating that

Institutions as well as people need friends...The ramification of citizen support for library services should not be underestimated as it has the potential to determine the future course of library service in this

country...It is not necessarily true that Friends groups will be effective in Australia. However, we need, to, indeed we must, try them.⁷

It was because of Dr Henderson's understanding of that issue and her commitment and that of her Public Libraries Branch colleagues to fostering Friends of Libraries (FOL) groups, that South Australia now has the highest number of FOL group per head of population in Australia.

Among some public librarians FOL groups have a mixed reputation for the work involved in supporting them, their effectiveness and even because they are perceived as a threat to their managerial prerogatives. Yet the only survey ever undertaken of Australian public libraries about their attitudes and experience with FOL groups,⁸ showed that they were generally regarded positively by those public librarians who had actually been involved in their development and support.

Comments included

- Get one, and give it all the support you can. You never know when you might need it.
- They can be demanding on a library manager's time but are particularly useful.
- Forming the group has taken a lot of time but I believe it has been worthwhile.
- FOL groups are the voice of our borrowers and as such should be supported.
- They can be hard work for the libraries but I consider them invaluable.
- They should be encouraged — our library has over 2000 members but without a Friends group they remain unrepresented and unorganized. The group gives us something of a focus when we are discussing our needs with council.

This last comment highlights one value of FOL groups, whether large or small, active, relatively inactive or even dormant — the symbolism of a local authority having its most heavily used and valued community provision regarded as so important that a support group for it has been initiated and maintained. This usually does not happen with other council services. In recent years there have been numerous examples where even a small FOL group has had influence far beyond its actual numbers on improved library facilities, buildings, resources and funding. This is because it has been accepted by a council as the voice of a very large part of the community.

Other survey comments reflected the perceptions and realities about FOL groups. One respondent shortsightedly suggested that they are not worth investing in unless a library is under threat. This misses the point that a Friends group may well ensure that a threat does not arise in the first place. The major reason given by respondents for not establishing a FOL group was lack of library management and other staff time. This highlights a catch 22 about whether making the time now to establish a FOL group, if it is effective, would encourage a council to be more receptive to improving library staffing and funding, more than compensating for the library's time invested in establishing the group. People who consider a matter important enough usually make time to attend to it. That 31 of the survey respondents raised lack of time as the issue is more likely a lack of knowledge or conviction that FOL groups have enough value and advocacy potential to justify their time.

FOL groups are not the single issue action lobby groups which sometimes arise in reaction to threats to a library, and which may call themselves 'friends of the library'. Friends of Libraries groups are distinguished from such groups by having an ongoing multidimensional mission, short and long term objectives, and membership requirements specified within a printed constitution. Their role is increasingly more than just providing or organising volunteers and raising supplementary funds for facilities for the library — it is 'political' and proactive in the broadest sense of the words. Public librarians should support and engage with them and through them the whole of the community in the political process, by open information sharing about local, state, national and international public

library issues and developments. This requires that public librarians themselves are well informed about those issues and developments — sometimes they are not.

Friends of Libraries Australia (FOLA)

FOLA is a nonprofit association in its 11th year as only the world's second national body for FOL groups, although other countries such as Canada, the UK, South Africa and New Zealand have, or are now considering, a similar body. It is developing as the national voice of library users, something which national professional library associations cannot be. It advises on practical, political and legal issues in establishing FOL groups, and assists individual groups where it can. This is primarily through its unpaid executive director Daniel Ferguson, a fulltime NSW public librarian, who initiated FOLA following his master's research into the development of FOL groups in the US.¹⁰ Without his outstanding commitment FOLA would not exist. FOLA's other major information resources are its *Friends of Libraries resource book*, the *FOLA newsletter* and its website.¹¹ It has no paid staff or office bearers on its national committee, members of which pay their own way to its meetings and to its annual conference. Its small funds derive largely from low subscriptions from FOL groups and some libraries, and a small number of library suppliers, with Bolinda Publishing being the largest sponsor. The FOLA patron is the Honourable Justice Michael Kirby AC CMG.

Among its initiatives have been an annual conference and awards for FOL groups sponsored by Baker and Taylor. Commencing in 2004 it also initiated an annual awareness raising Report to the Nation, the first of which was on Australian BookStart for babies, and the second of which on library services for Seniors will be launched at its October 2005 conference in Adelaide.

FOLA recognises that fostering and sustaining FOL groups requires of public librarians marketing of the concept, time, practical assistance, compromise — and sometimes the ability to work with people with strong personalities and their own agendas. It also recognises that with so many people in the community 'time poor', initiating and maintaining FOL groups requires imagination, creative thinking and persistence. In particular it may be difficult to engage younger people in them, although some Junior Friends of Libraries have been established.

It may also require political dexterity and risk taking. A few respondents to the FOL survey referred to earlier indicated that their CEOs or councils were not supportive of the concept, comments including 'possible conflict of interest with council policy' 'CEO considers a group would be too pushy' and 'not acceptable to a council where community consultation is not valued and is actively discouraged'. These comments seem, although they would undoubtedly still be true of some CEOs and councils, redolent of an arrogance which should be disappearing from local government. They are certainly not consistent with councils as grassroots parts of a democratic society. Just to prove that it is not only councils which may culpable of narrow vision and a controlling disposition, one of the responses to the survey stated that 'Until recently the State Library of...did not foster or allow Friends groups'.

However FOLA considers that issues such as the above should serve as cautions rather than deterrents or excuses for public librarians not fostering Friends groups as the informed, supporting and advocating voice of those 12 million library users.

As Daniel Ferguson has observed

A library profession which involves the community and establishes an opportunity for citizens to express views and assist in the support of services will create lasting benefits, not only for itself, but also for the public library as an institution. Successful Friends groups in Australia have harnessed community support, participation of the library manager, respect of staff and an involvement of other interested parties.¹²

In summary

- Australia's public libraries produce by far the best return on investment of any agency in Australia

- they need to at least double their funding in real terms from 7c per Australian per day to 14c by 2010 if they are to achieve anything like their full potential contribution to an educated, informed, recreated and connected society
- this increased funding is required to improve resources, provide seven day a week opening, employ more specialist library professional and other staff, improve services, programs and outreach services, buildings, technology, collaboration with schools and other libraries and community and social agencies, and marketing
- public librarians will only have limited success in achieving improved funding, individually or collectively through their local or national professional associations. They are always likely to be perceived as pleading their own cause — yet another ‘industry bleat’
- they are more likely to have success if they carefully and strategically capitalise at the local and state levels on the great latent support for, and goodwill to, public libraries
- a proven mechanism for doing so is the fostering of Friends groups as the voice of the community about public libraries
- this fostering requires central leadership, encouragement and support from state public library agencies and library professional associations, assisted by FOLA
- it requires the fostering of statewide and regional networks and conferences of FOL groups for maximum impact on state governments
- it requires public librarians to be fully informed about public library investment levels, the return on investment, and to identify and assert what funding they need to achieve an optimal return for the whole of the community
- it requires public librarians to share that information with their FOL groups and to work with them in bringing that information systematically to the attention of the broader community and those who make decisions on its behalf.

A matter of wisdom

Public libraries have been described by many people in very positive terms.¹³ One recent description by a West Australian GP, Stuart Paterson, says it particularly well

Public libraries, schools and a freely accessible health system are crucial to a well functioning society and the funding thereof a sign of a well functioning government.¹⁴

They are a fundamental testbed of civic values and citizenship, community anchors which give us a sense of place. However, as with democracy itself, the price of good libraries for all is eternal vigilance, and the price of better libraries for all is informed and ongoing advocacy. The lay focus for that vigilance and advocacy can only be formally constituted Friends of Libraries. They are the inheritors of that mantle of responsibility accepted by those few laypersons who led, fought and persisted in the 1930s, 40s and 50s — those few to whom at least 12 million Australians are indebted for today’s public libraries.

As Vigdor Schreiber has asserted

Libraries serve democracy not the pursuit of wealth. The constituency for democracy is the People, who have the fundamental constitutional right to exercise exclusive control over the election of our government. That is where the power of libraries also lies, if they are wise enough to marshal that unique resource¹⁵

The manifestation of that wisdom must surely be fostering Friends groups, locally and statewide, as citizen advocates for better libraries. The responsibility for that fostering now lies largely with public librarians as integral, not optional, to their own role and continuing success in developing Australia's most valued and used resource — its public libraries.

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- 14 *in email to* Betty McGeever, City Librarian of Fremantle WA
- 15 <http://sunsite.utr.edu/FINS>

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During 1988 and again in 2002 Dr Bundy was national president of the Australian Library and Information Association, and in April 1998 was awarded the HCL Anderson Award of the Association, its premier professional award. He became president of Friends of Libraries Australia in 2005, and also in 2005 was made a Member of the Order of Australia for services to academic, school and public libraries, and the promotion of better information access by citizens.

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