Libraries in the digital environment

National & State Libraries Australasia

National & State Libraries Australasia
(Formerly the Council of Australian State Libraries)

ACT Library & Information Service
National Library of Australia
National Library of New Zealand
Northern Territory Library
State Library of New South Wales
State Library of Queensland
State Library of South Australia
State Library of Tasmania
State Library of Victoria
State Library of Western Australia

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Libraries connect people to information – on all subjects, in any format and for any purpose. In the digital environment, this can be achieved more effectively than ever before. Libraries are transforming their services, grasping the opportunities presented by digital technologies and an increasingly connected Australian population.

Libraries have responded by creating significant national digital collections and services, such as LibrariesAustralia, PictureAustralia, MusicAustralia, Australia Dancing, PANDORA, MyLanguage and the AskNow! online reference service, building on decades of collaborative technological initiatives across the country.

Local and state-based digital projects are also burgeoning, building skills broadly across the sector and contributing to the national federation of digital resources and services. Underpinning these is the principle of equitable access across economic, cultural and geographical divisions, and the expertise of information professionals.

Access to the collections of scientific, historical and cultural content held across the nation is fundamental to education, research, innovation, creativity and to the robustness of the Australian community. Libraries have made great strides toward digitising this content and developing digital services that make it easier to find and to obtain information when and where it is wanted. The challenges are to accelerate the pace of digitisation and so to release the potential that is held in Australia's collecting institutions, and to collect and preserve the born-digital.

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Examples of digital services for students:
www.anyquestions.co.nz – online reference and information literacy for school students, New Zealand National and Public Libraries
www.infocus.sl.nsw.gov.au – linking students studying Year 12 with resources at the State Library of New South Wales
www.insideadog.com.au – interactive book review website for teenagers, Centre for Youth Literature, State Library of Victoria

The National Policy Framework for Indigenous Library Services and Collections has recently been endorsed by National & State Libraries Australasia and will be launched later in **2006**.

The exhibition *National Treasures from Australia's Great Libraries* is travelling to all states and territories in 2006–07.
www.nationaltreasures.nla.gov.au
A podcast offering a taste of the exhibition is available.
www.tmag.tas.gov.au/podcast

LibrariesAustralia, the combined catalogues of Australia's libraries, lists more than **42 million** books, maps, journals, pictures, government reports, newspapers, musical scores, etc – locating the library where the item is held and advising on how to place a request. Extending the interlibrary loan gateway to New Zealand in 2005 has made a combined resource of **56 million** items.
www.librariesaustralia.nla.gov.au

Over **11,000** Australian websites have been selected, preserved and made accessible in PANDORA.
www.pandora.nla.gov.au

MyLanguage is a national web portal for multicultural Australia, linking to search engines, web directories, news services, government websites, and digital library projects in **60 languages**.
www.mylanguage.gov.au

The body of work for libraries

Responding to the challenges and opportunities of the digital environment, the current body of work for libraries spans a broad front of digitisation projects, collaborative initiatives, and reshaping service frameworks. Some of these are:

National licensing
The library sector is purchasing national licenses for a small number of online databases that are not freely available on the internet. This project will allow all Australians to use these resources from their desktop or in a library without cost. To this point, consortium purchasing of online databases has been limited to groups within the sector, such as law libraries, academic libraries, health libraries or public libraries. The move to national site licensing is a powerful model. The first three resources are due to be made available in 2007 and will include an online health database and an encyclopedia.

Digitising collections
Libraries are at a turning point, changing focus from the digitisation of discrete collections to considering how to achieve mass digitisation. Strategies and priorities are being developed, and investment in digitisation equipment and skills is increasing. There is an agreed preference for digital over print resources.

Creating new services
New approaches to reference and information services, such as AskNow! in Australia and Any Questions in New Zealand, have shown the popularity and the potential of online reference. Developing from these prototypes is a key challenge for libraries, expanding their reach, increasing the resources they can provide in response to requests, and integrating this service into core library services. Behind online reference services there also sits the improvement and reshaping of online document delivery services, digitisation-on-demand, and moving physical items more quickly to the point of need.

Digital preservation
In 2005, the National Library of Australia commissioned the first whole-of-domain harvest of the internet for the .au domain, to test the information gained and the issues to be addressed in this kind of preservation project. Analysis is still underway and feedback has been sought from international internet experts. A report on the first harvest will be released soon and the second harvest is planned for later in 2006. This project is in addition to the active long-term preservation of selected authoritative sites undertaken via PANDORA, Australia's online archive. PANDORA identifies, collects and saves born-digital information for the future.

Digital repositories
The National Library of Australia has begun working with GeoScience Australia, the Australian Bureau of Statistics, the National Archives of Australia and others to establish a digital repository for government digital information resources and data sets. This exploratory project is highlighting the issues to be addressed and the broad need across the public and private sphere for trusted digital repositories. To complement Tasmanian legal deposit legislation, the State Library of Tasmania has developed an online jurisdictional repository called STORS (Stable Tasmanian Open Repository Service) to enable publishers to readily deposit electronic publications.

Interactive digital space
PictureAustralia now includes over 5000 contemporary images from Flickr. A joint initiative with Yahoo!, this project began in January 2006 and the response has far exceeded expectations. Encouraging and supporting community creativity and contribution to the national collections is a priority for libraries. Across the sector there is research underway to explore the opportunities in interactive annotation/comment within and surrounding library catalogues, Wikipedia-style information services, and providing options to remix and reformat in a Web 2.0 environment.

Collaborating
National & State Libraries Australasia has entered into an agreement with the Department of Education, Science & Training to investigate an AskNow!-style online reference service for students, similar to the Any Questions service operating successfully in New Zealand. Consortium purchasing arrangements are also being extended between members of National & State Libraries Australasia to support online reference services. Many other collaborations are planned or part of the ongoing development of services for the community, including Indigenous Knowledge Centres in Queensland and Northern Territory; the development of the Cultural Broadband Network in Victoria; and the endorsement and implementation of the National Content Strategy in New Zealand, a landmark project headed by the National Library of New Zealand.

Aspirations for the national digital agenda

National & State Libraries Australasia believes that collaboration and shared advocacy across the collections sector will strengthen us all in the digital world. As in many areas of business, education and industry, the digital environment is fostering convergence. The strategic directions for the domains within the collections sector are becoming increasingly aligned as we digitise and preserve our collections and explore the possibilities of new digital services. A shared voice can work for all parts of the sector.

It is essential that the national digital agenda address:

Accelerating the digitisation of collections
Significant government funding is required to increase the pace of digitisation of existing collections so that they become accessible in the new environment. With Google the first point of investigation for information, making our collections discoverable online is essential. Libraries are currently searching for funding for a major Australian newspaper digitisation project over the next three years. This project and the digitisation of critical collections, such as past and present government publications and many others held in the collecting institutions across the country, require significant public funding.

Expanding national licensing
Funding to allow national purchasing of subscriptions to a broader range of commercial databases will build a significant information resource for all Australians, giving access to information previously only available at a cost.

Developing a network of trusted repositories
A national infrastructure of trusted digital repositories is crucial to preserving our digital heritage. This responsibility straddles the collections sector domains and requires national and coordinated effort. It would encompass private and public digital content as well as research data sets from many fields and should be based on principles of free and open search and discovery as well as long-term preservation.

Preserving the born-digital
Identifying, collecting and ensuring ongoing access to born-digital information is a major task, requiring government funding and commitment to collaborative research. PANDORA, university sector repositories and others have achieved much, but the continuing development of technological solutions is required to safeguard digital content.

Extending legal deposit legislation
Legal deposit legislation for printed materials currently exists in all jurisdictions in Australia, requiring copies of all publications to be lodged in selected libraries. This should be extended to online publications, as has been done in Tasmania, New Zealand and many other parts of the world, to ensure that our digital heritage is discovered, collected and preserved.

Reforming copyright legislation
Changes in technology and the ability to access information quickly and efficiently require a fundamental reframing of copyright legislation to ensure that the rights of copyright holders are protected and that access is not inhibited.

A national vision for the collections sector is imperative. National & State Libraries Australasia is ready to partner with the Collections Council of Australia and other parts of the collections sector to develop a shared vision and national agenda for cooperation to ensure that, in the future, every Australian will have free online access to services that deliver information when and where it is needed, to their cultural heritage and to community digital space.

Visitors to NSLA Libraries in 2004–05: **4.5 million**

Online visitors to NSLA websites in 2004–05: **112.5 million**

NSLA collections and buildings:

Collections (at June 05): **$4 billion**

Collections expenditure 2004–05: **$20.7 million**

Sites/buildings (at June 05): **$909.3 million**

PictureAustralia, MusicAustralia and Australia Dancing are national online collaborative initiatives, managed by the National Library of Australia, bringing together collections in libraries, museums, archives, and private and public organisations. There are over **1 million images** available through PictureAustralia.
www.pictureaustralia.org
www.musicaustralia.org
www.australiadancing.org

AskNow! is a free virtual reference service where answers are provided immediately by professional librarians using chat software. The service is provided by staff from NSLA Libraries, public libraries across Australia and by the National Library Board of Singapore. More than **106,000 sessions** have been conducted.
www.asknow.gov.au

Other examples of online collections:

The Sir Donald Bradman Digital Library, State Library of South Australia
www.slsa.sa.gov.au/bradman

Cyclone Tracy website, NT Library
www.ntlib.nt.gov.au/tracy

Tasmania Online is a comprehensive listing of Tasmanian government, business and community websites, developed by the State Library of Tasmania.
www.tas.gov.au/tasmaniaonline