Cooperation and Influence : history and priorities of the Council of Australian State Libraries
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Abstract
As the peak body for the State, Territory and National Libraries, the Council of Australian State Libraries has expanded from an initial focus on lobbying Commonwealth Government for funding to supporting a wide range of collaborative initiatives between member libraries and with other organisations in the cultural sector. The Council of Australian State Libraries is an active participant in the national debate on the challenges and changes in the provision of information services and preserving our documentary heritage.

Introduction

The Council of Australian State Libraries (CASL) was established to provide a unified voice to government on behalf of its members. Libraries have historically been highly collaborative within their industry, leading to the early take-up of networked technology and standards, but they have been continually challenged by the critical need to lobby effectively as a group outside the industry. CASL has been addressing this challenge for thirty years, while other library industry peak bodies have been established and disbanded. It has also expanded its charter to include working towards the promotion of libraries throughout the community, strengthening the national information infrastructure, encouraging cooperation and collaboration with other sectors, and supporting the public library network.

The State Librarians Council (SLC) held its first meeting in March 1973 in response to a perceived need for a new peak body that would be more effective in lobbying for aid and consideration by the Commonwealth Government. The meeting included the State Librarians from New South Wales, Western Australian, South Australia, Tasmania, Queensland and Victoria. Since this time, the SLC, with its name changes to the State Libraries Council and then Council of Australian State Libraries, has expanded its membership to include the chief executives of the Northern Territory and Australian Capital Territory Library & Information Services, and the National Library of Australia. CASL has been influential in many successful cross-sectoral projects, submissions to government, partnership and sponsorship agreements, and collaborative technological advancements, and there is still the same pressing need in 2003 for a unified voice as there was in 1973.

CASL is currently contributing to the feasibility studies by the Dept of Communications Information Technology and the Arts (DCITA) on establishing a cross-sectoral industry body for libraries, archives, museums and art galleries, working to ensure that the issues of the library industry are equitably represented. They have also recently made submissions to a number of government committees and inquiries, including the Senate Inquiry into Libraries in the Online Environment; Review of Teaching and Teacher Education; and the DCITA review of Australian Museums On Line. The Council has stated that their key priority for 2003 is the promotion and advancement of library and information services, to demonstrate the value of libraries in the economic and intellectual development of the nation. This is being undertaken through the

projects of its working groups, increased interaction with cross-sectoral issues and commitment to broad-based collaborative partnerships.

Membership
The first meeting of the State Librarians Council was called by Mr Ken Horn of the State Library of Victoria on 30 March 1973, in response to a letter from Mr Kim Beazley Sr, then Minister for Education and Science in the Whitlam government, on the possibility of a federal committee of inquiry into funding of public libraries. The letter was sent to the Australian Advisory Council on Bibliographical Services (AACOBS) and Horn was concerned that this body could not provide the most appropriate reply to Mr Beazley, especially for the State Libraries. AACOBS was seen as having both an "uncertain future" and an "unwieldy structure"[i]. The meeting agreed to establish a new peak body consisting of the State Librarians from the six states, meeting at least twice a year.

At this first meeting, they also discussed the need for direct representation to the Commonwealth Government. Prior to this, the State Ministers covering library services were the primary representatives of State Libraries in the Federal sphere. The SLC expressed concern that the priorities of their Ministers were not always the priorities of the State Libraries. During this period there was increased tension between Federal and State governments and the States were jealous of their rights. The SLC thought their Ministers might not wish to initiate action that resulted in aid for libraries with Commonwealth-imposed conditions. The SLC were prepared to consider any aid favourably.

For the first 7 years of the SLC, the Chair was the longest-serving State Librarian but this changed to two or three year terms from 1980. Mr F A Starr of Western Australia was the first Chair until April 1976, followed by Mr K A R Horn of Victoria, then Mr W L Brown of Tasmania who served from 1980 til 1986. Since then the Chair has been based in Western Australia (twice), Queensland, South Australia, New South Wales and Victoria. The Northern Territory joined the Council in 1980, represented by Mr Ron Davis, followed by the Australian Capital Territory in 1986. The first ACT representative was Mr David Barron.

The Council had a strained relationship with the National Library of Australia until Mr Warren Horton became Director-General in 1986. On many occasions the National Library represented the library industry to Federal government and the SLC felt that their views were not always effectively represented by earlier Director-Generals. The National Library chaired a number of national advisory committees in the 1970s and 1980s on services for the disabled, resources in specific subject areas such as humanities, science and technology and the social sciences, and public and state library issues. The SLC were concerned that these advisory committees did not meet frequently enough to achieve their goals or to provide democratic representation, and were dominated by the National Library.

When Mr Warren Horton, an ex-State Librarian of Victoria, become the Director-General of the National Library in 1986, the SLC felt new confidence that they would be able to work effectively together. From the beginning of his tenure, he was invited to attend SLC meetings as an observer and this became a permanent invitation from the early 1990s. There was still some concern that the National Library had a different agenda to that of the State Libraries and might begin to affect its priorities and strategies. By the time Ms Jan Fullerton became Director-General in 1999, these concerns had abated and the National Library was asked to join as a full member on the understanding that they "would not generally serve as Chair"[ii].

Other Peak Bodies

In the 1970s, the Australian Advisory Council on Bibliographic Services (AACOBS) was the main industry peak body, apart from the Library Association of Australia (later Australian Library and Information Association). At this time, the LAA represented individuals within the profession only and did not expand to include industry members until 1998. AACOBS was established in 1956 to support the development of national bibliographic services and included broad membership across public, special, university and state libraries, plus the National Library. It was originally funded and hosted by the National Library but in the straightened economic climate of the mid-70s it switched to funding by subscription. Its structure, funding and concentration on bibliographic issues meant that it could not provide ongoing representation of the library industry through the full range of issues, so new groups like the SLC and the Council of Australian University Libraries (CAUL) began to emerge.

Libraries were being seriously affected by funding shortages, rapid changes in technology and increasing use of their services, so there was sufficient impetus to continue efforts to maintain a representative body across the industry. The Australian Libraries and Information Council (ALIC) was formed in 1981 and in the late 1980s it merged with AACOBS to become the Australian Council of Libraries and Information Services (ACLIS). All of these groups suffered from the diversity of their membership base with different issues and directions dividing them and dispersing their effectiveness. The SLC outlived these other groups, seemingly because it was a small, distinct and like-minded group, and the Council members were prepared to support the broader aims of these other industry groups as well as advancing their own issues.

ACLIS closed its office in December 1998 following the recommendations of the *Strategic Review of Library Co-ordination and Representation Report* (*1997)* commissioned by ACLIS and ALIA and extensive negotiations to merge with ALIA. Through 1999, there were discussions about the possibility of another new peak body, especially in response to comments from Mr Warren Horton of the National Library that they were "having difficulty obtaining cross-sectoral comment and discussion of issues"[iii] but no new agreement was reached. In 2000 CASL met with CAUL to discuss a proposal for a new body that could lobby on behalf of the membership of these two organisations. The meeting concluded that the potential was limited because of the divergent requirements of the two sectors and this proposal was dropped.

The decision that there would be no new library industry body at the turn of the century acted as a catalyst to CASL and they began to review and invigorate their initiatives and direction, concentrating on increasing their profile in the key areas of public information policy, information literacy and issues relating to equity and access.

The current proposal by DCITA to establish a Collections Sector industry body, encompassing archives, museums, art galleries and libraries, shows the stimulus to cooperate and provide a united voice to government remains strong. It also highlights the benefits to the Commonwealth government in dealing with fewer organisations, pushing responsibility for negotiating the divergent interests back on the members.

Influencing the Political Agenda

The initial attempt by the SLC to influence the national political agenda was in their submission to the Commonwealth Committee of Inquiry into Public Libraries (chaired by Alan Horton) in 1974. This committee was working within an environment of major changes and support for the arts in the Whitlam government and had the support of the Minister and the broad library industry. The SLC made a detailed submission to the Inquiry and championed the report that resulted. Unfortunately the change of government in 1975, before the final report was released in February 1976, meant that the key recommendations were never implemented. These included a new $20 million Commonwealth fund for libraries in the first year, plus the establishment of a national council for planning and supervising Commonwealth spending programs.

On 5th December 1979 there was a meeting of the Arts Ministers from all states in Perth to discuss a range of issues including the recommendations of the Horton Report. Most of the State Librarians accompanied their Minister and were present for the discussion on establishing a new national body for libraries to facilitate discourse with the Commonwealth government. The Ministers agreed that the SLC, with the National Library, should develop the concept of a national council for consideration by Ministers. This resulted in the formation of the Australian Libraries and Information Council (ALIC), with members appointed by the federal government and including all members of the SLC.

With ALIC attempting to represent the national agenda for libraries, the SLC moved to target key issues of importance to State Libraries in their lobbying of government. These included : advising in the development of Archives and Freedom of Information legislation in the late 1970s; responding to Prime Minister Hawke's multicultural policy statement in 1987; contributing submissions to the Review of the Taxation System in 1985, the 1988 inquiry into funding for public libraries, and inquiries into sales tax on books, computer hardware, software, and spoken word cassettes; working with government in the establishment of the Heritage Collections Council in 1993; and a wide range of other contributions.

Ongoing Challenges

As part of addressing its primary concerns, there are three areas that stand out as constant challenges for CASL through its thirty-year history. The first is effective promotion of libraries, changing their image in the public mind from a staid stereotype to dynamic information providers. This involves maintaining the traditional values of libraries in the public perception such as equity of access, freedom of information, service and stewardship of collections, while introducing the new agenda of access to information online (onsite within libraries and offsite through library portals), digitising collections, cooperative ventures, tailored information packaging and much more. This challenge to change the image of libraries sits behind many of the initiatives and lobbying activities of the Council and affects the whole of the industry. Better recognition and acknowledgement of the new role of libraries is fundamental to their standing in the community, their funding and their robustness.

A second strand that has challenged CASL since its inception is collecting and maintaining useful statistical analysis of the members as a group, for use inside and outside the industry. In 1978 the SLC examined the new statistics collection tool and grid being trialed by AACOBS and found it unsuitable. One of the members then attempted to develop an adapted version but this too was not successfully implemented by the Council. Other statistical collection methods were used for brief periods during the 1980s and 1990s but with the changing environment, the variety of information collected across the member libraries and the range of possible uses for

the results, no method was successfully adopted for the longer term. The current CASL Performance Measures Working Group is again looking at this issue with the hope of identifying a small number of standard and useful statistics that can be gathered across the member libraries. Statistics collection for public libraries has been more focused and so less problematical, concentrating on simple quantitative measures, with annual statistical publications being produced by CASL since 1996.

The third ongoing challenge that can be traced through the history of CASL is the relationship between libraries and the education sector. Students are the largest client group using the CASL Libraries, accounting for more than 50% of visits in 2001-2002. The pivotal role of the CASL Libraries in supporting the education sector began to be acknowledged in the 1970s and has been clear within the industry since this time. Gaining recognition of this role in funding arrangements has been more difficult. In 1974 the Whitlam government opened the first joint school/public library in Boronia in Melbourne. This was seen by the SLC as the first step to a greater cooperation between the two sectors and requests were made to the federal government for this pilot to be professionally evaluated by an academic institution. This was agreed to by Mr Beazley as Minister for Education but, as with other Whitlam government agreements, it was not followed through by the next government. The trend to joint facilities also did not continue, but the issue of cooperation with the education sector and funding for this role remained on the SLC agenda, and is still a key priority for CASL. In the early 1990s CASL Libraries became members of AARNET, the university pre-internet network, negotiating the role of both state and public libraries in the new environment and pushing for the opening up of the technological infrastructure.

Also in the 1990s, CASL Libraries began to expand and publicise their role in lifelong learning, the education programs they provide and the support given to individual learners, and this led to the formation of the CASL Partnerships Between Education and Libraries Working Group. This group has identified more than 70 existing joint projects[iv] across Australia and promotes the recognition of shared objectives across the two sectors, partnership models and lifelong learning initiatives. CASL has also recommended further acknowledgement, recognition and exploration of this relationship in submissions to government inquiries.

Successful Collaborations
CASL has provided a forum for cooperation for many large and smaller successful projects over the thirty years. Notable successes have been : Picture Australia, with its cross-sectoral partnerships; Australian Pictorial Thesaurus project; the Distributed National Collection agreement in 1993; the National Plan for Australian Newspapers; Document Delivery pricing agreements; travelling exhibitions especially those that were part of the Towards Federation 2001 program; national collecting level standards; CASL Consortium for the joint purchasing of online databases; AskNow online reference pilot project in 2002-3; and many others.

As part of its charter, the National Library of Australia has played a major role in most of these projects, especially by providing project management and infrastructure support, while the other CASL members have contributed the commitment, personnel and resources needed for these national collaborations to be successful.

Belonging : A Century Celebrated, a major travelling exhibition launched in January 2001 as part of the Centenary of Federation celebrations, was a cooperative project of the National Library, the National Archives of Australia, the State Library of New South Wales and the State

Library of Victoria. It featured more than 300 items from the heritage collections of these organisations, celebrating Australia and its nationhood since 1901. The exhibition travelled to 5 major centres in Australia throughout 2001 attracting more than 100,000 people[v].

Picture Australia began in 1998 as a pilot project between the National Library of Australia, the Australian War Memorial and the State Libraries of New South Wales, Victoria and Tasmania. It received very strong support from both the public and the cultural community and in 2000 was launched as a fully-fledged service with the number of participating libraries, museums, archives and art galleries increasing as it became more widely known and used. As of June 2003 the online picture collections of 25 Australian institutions are available through one website. This project has been a model in cooperation across the cultural sector.

Current Focus

At the beginning of 2003 the members of CASL agreed to concentrate their efforts for this calendar year on the promotion and marketing of libraries in the wider community. One strategy is the adoption of the successful international marketing campaign using the "@yourlibrary" tagline, licensed through the International Federation of Library Associations and Institutions (IFLA). CASL signed an agreement with IFLA in 2002 on behalf of its members and public libraries and has encouraged the use of this tagline in promotional material as a branding tool across the industry. The State Library of South Australia has been at the forefront in the use of this campaign in Australia with the "2003@yourlibrary Campaign" launched in December 2002 to lead into the opening of their new library in 2003. CASL projects, public library networks and individual libraries are beginning to use this tagline and ALIA has endorsed the nationwide campaign.

Other promotional initiatives include the development of a new travelling exhibition for 2004-2005 displaying significant documents and objects in CASL collections, following on from the success of the National Library of Australia's exhibition in 2000-2001 "Treasures from the World's Great Libraries". Exhibitions such as this bring in new clients, gain media attention for libraries, and highlight the richness and diversity of the collections.

CASL is also working towards the promotion and advancement of libraries within the cultural sector and to government through contributions to : the review of Australian Museums Online; to the feasibility study for a new industry body across the libraries, museums, archives and art galleries sector; and to other forums as they arise. An associated strategy is the initiation and support for Public Libraries Australia Ltd, a national peak body for public libraries. This body is still in development but aims to provide a separate voice for public libraries to Commonwealth government and to maximise cooperative opportunities.

Another current focus for CASL is the AskNow collaborative online reference service, being piloted by the CASL Reference Issues Working Group. This project uses tailored reference chat software allowing librarians to answer reference questions in real time, to push web pages, to roster service provision from dispersed locations across Australia, and to monitor the use. The pilot service began in August 2002 and is now answering approximately 200 inquiries per day. In March 2003, CASL received requests from both the National Library of New

Zealand and the National Library of Singapore to become part of this project and negotiations are underway to make this an international service.

CASL has nine current working groups and two project groups, with representation from each member library. These groups work on : Digital Issues; Reference Issues; Consortial Purchasing; Public Programs and Communications; Partnerships Between Libraries and Education; Electronic Multicultural Library Services; Public Library Performance Measures; CASL Performance Measures; Copyright; Public Libraries Australia; and the Australian Pictorial Thesaurus. CASL is also represented on external committees such as the Australian Digital Alliance, Australian Library Collections Task Force, Standards Australia Information Technology Standards Committee, and others.

Conclusion

The Council of Australian State Libraries and its predecessors have expanded from an initial focus on representing the interests of their members to the Commonwealth government to developing opportunities for effective cooperation between members, building partnerships within the industry and with other parts of the cultural sector. CASL has retained its cohesion through the evolving round of library peak bodies and is at the forefront of the library industry's lobbying and conversation with the Commonwealth government. It responds to the changing environment by encouraging debate and communication between its members, by speaking out on issues of information policy and infrastructure, and by creating working groups with national representation to address issues and to respond to opportunities. The CASL Key Priorities 2003-2005[vi] agreement shows an ongoing commitment to these objectives.

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Endnotes

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