

FRONT LINE



Bev Kirby, ALIA VIC Branch President

In November 1989, the current President of ALIA, Lynn Allen wrote a Frontline article for *inCite* raising important questions about the relative roles of ALIA and ACLIS. Lynn identified objectives essential to cooperation and these related to joint and exclusive role definition and a cooperative focus on issues and policy advice.

Her article talked about the need for ALIA to be a strong professional association. Right now branches are being asked to share ideas about projects for recruitment and retention. On the subject of role definition and the issue of recruitment and retaining members, I welcome the opportunity to raise what for me has been a long standing concern.

I believe that ALIA has had a problem with role definition and that being clear about its role is crucial to survival of the Association and in the short term, to its relationship with ACLIS. To become stronger ALIA must actively market itself to the thousands of non-members working in our libraries. We need the strength of numbers and we need to be seen as representing all librarians and library technicians. ALIA should never talk of a separate association for teacher-librarians or any other group.

ALIA should not be afraid to investigate a reduction in membership fees, discounts of up to 50 per cent to conferences et cetera to personal members only and even personal membership only. ACLIS will speak out on issues which affect the management of libraries but ALIA must be ready to speak on issues which affect the profession as a whole.

As Branch President I talk to groups and individuals about the Association. I concentrate on ALIA's support for the individual in education

and training, maintenance of standards, networking and professional development. I believe in ALIA's role in all of these and see no reason why people need to choose between ALIA and ACLIS or ALIA and SLAV.

This is my second opportunity to write a Frontline article. The first in November last year gave me the chance to talk about award restructuring and of ALIA providing a forum for information exchange and communication. We are only at the beginning of what will be a long and complex task to support our members. As a librarian not working in a particular library I can only look to ALIA for this kind of support. I am not represented by ACLIS or by any other library management group. And there are many other ALIA members like me.

I am not concerned that ACLIS presents a view on issues of a library management nature as long as it makes no claim to represent me, the profession or indeed, libraries generally. However, I am concerned if ALIA continues to promote institutional membership and is in conflict with ACLIS on policy matters from a management perspective.

ACLIS approaches its advisory role with fervour and it is important now that ALIA is clear about its role and is able to make its claim to represent the profession and not organisations.

I am concerned with the institutional membership of ALIA and have never had a satisfactory answer to the question of how ALIA serves two distinct groups, the individual and the employer. I have never ascertained why it is fair that in order to get a discount for one conference I may be able to attend each year I must continue my membership while a number of non-members in a member institution get discounts by using over and over again the privileges of one institutional membership.

Before becoming a Vice-President I was Secretary of the Branch. At that time, Victoria was busy planning a recruitment and retention campaign and I undertook to analyse the records of lapsed memberships. Head Office supplied the records which included current members and this started me on an investigation with some disturbing results.

I looked for the names of the various chief librarians in academic and public libraries and there were an alarming number who were not members. The data showed that there were a large number of people nominated as representatives for an institution but not members in their own right. I saw there were many libraries with no members

at all and some of the larger libraries had very few members. I noticed an alarming tendency for people to join ALIA and then leave within a very short time. Many of these were new graduates.

We now have less institutional members as more libraries take out voucher only membership instead. But can we say that ALIA has been attracting as members all of those who have resisted for so long? Those who manage to get what they need from the copy of *inCite* on the staff notice board or the use of an institutional membership to get a discount seem to be lost to ALIA forever.

Why is there a need to increase our membership base? Greater attention is always paid to the lobbying efforts of large groups and there are the usual financial benefits in increased revenue or lower membership fees. My concern is that unlike ACLIS and outside of conferences, workshops et cetera ALIA activities are usually in the members' own time. I would suggest that more members will mean more people are likely to give up their spare time and the greater the benefits to the profession.

On the state and national level we must work towards:

- a clear role definition for ALIA
- identification of all potential library and library technician members
- an investigation into what we need to do with membership fees and entitlements to attract and hold members
- a sound marketing package
- a reasonable membership target within a specified period.

An urgent concern about award restructuring and its potential to fragment the profession and erode career structures and career opportunities has led many people to look to ALIA for support. There is a crucial role for ALIA in identifying its potential and responsibility for skills accreditation. Yes we do need a strong association and some strong ideas about what we are doing and where we are going. We need a marketing plan and we need it now.



EVENTS DEADLINES

Issue 11- Monday 25 June

Issue 12- Monday 16 July

Issue 13- Monday 30 July

ALIA Division Activities-

Free (limited to 30 words)

All others - \$30 per entry