

# **ACT Legislative Assembly Standing Committee on Environment and Transport and City Services inquiry into ACT Libraries**

**Statement, 17 October 2018**

We would like to thank the committee for providing the Australian Library and Information Association – ALIA – with the opportunity to provide evidence in response to its inquiry into ACT Libraries.

We are the peak body for libraries in Australia and we work closely with public libraries in every state and territory to develop programs, campaigns, standards, advocacy and other initiatives. Through ALIA's Australian Public Library Alliance, there is an active and effective national network which helps spread ideas, share best practice and create the critical mass that enables major projects to be undertaken.

While there are always financial challenges for government-funded services, we would like to focus on the opportunities offered by public libraries to promote key agenda items.

To restate the figures in our submission, Australia has more than 1500 central, branch and mobile libraries, with 9.3 million registered members and more than 113 million customer visits each year.

Around Australia, capital cities are investing in libraries as a very visible symbol of their aspiration to embrace the 'smart cities' ethos.

- Sydney has the Customs House Library on Circular Quay – a trendy tourist-magnet; the multi-award-winning sustainable-design Surry Hills Library and the new Green Square Library, featuring a 6-storey glass tower, subterranean garden and open air amphitheatre.
- Melbourne has the Library at the Dock, Australia's first six star green rated public building, with creative editing suites, performance spaces and a recording studio. It was shortlisted for the International Public Library of the Year Award in 2015.
- Perth has its new city library, the first major civic building to be constructed since the Perth Concert Hall 45 years ago. Built in the round, over seven levels, it has meeting spaces, a roof terrace and Perth's largest living green wall.

And I could go on ... Brisbane, Adelaide, Geelong ... major metro and regional cities and smaller towns are all investing in modern libraries which will help bridge the literacy and digital divide for future generations.

But it's not just about stunning design, it is also about the conceptual considerations that sit behind these statement buildings.

The people behind Dokk1 library in Aarhus, Denmark, are considered to be some of the world's foremost library thinkers. They talk about user-driven innovation; libraries as part of the fabric of the city; and libraries as homes for communities of interest. This approach has created an energised, community-focused multi-media centre for knowledge and culture: the library as the 'citizens' house'. This is the kind of potential that can be realised by libraries in the ACT.

In our submission, we described Libraries ACT as a well-used, highly valued, tightly managed, efficient library service. We also flagged that there is little capacity to embrace new opportunities as they arise – and this does come down to funding. ACT libraries' total expenditure per capita is the lowest in Australia at just over \$34, compared with the highest expenditure per capita of more than \$62 for South Australia.

For Libraries ACT to fulfil its potential, Canberrans need to be closely engaged in the evolution of library spaces, programs and services. There needs to be a greater emphasis on digital formats, digital inclusion and tech services. There needs to be recognition of the vital role played by libraries in early childhood learning, language and literacy development. And there needs to be consideration of a funding model which will compare with that of other large city library services in Australia.

On a final note, other states and territories benefit from legal deposit legislation, which ensures that all published materials are lodged with the relevant State or Territory Library. The ACT sadly lacks this legislation which, if in place, would ensure the safe-keeping and long term preservation of the documentary heritage of the Territory.

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