



Virginia Walsh

Executive director

The two professions share a belief in a common set of ethical values. They are vested with the responsibility — both in a moral and a legal sense — to preserve an unbroken continuum of the cultural, scholarly and social existence of human societies and to provide free access to its products.

The Beijing Agenda

Opportunities for co-operation between the archives and library communities

The Beijing Agenda emerged from the historic joint meeting of the world bodies for archivists (ICA) and librarians (IFLA) held in China on the first day of September 1996. Delegates to this event, also involving the United Nations Education, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO), addressed some of the big issues facing both professions today — particularly relating to access, preservation and storage of digital records. But it was also sobering to note, especially in view of the breadth of national and cultural groups represented at the meeting, that problems remain in the basic preservation of traditional paper-based information resources too. Importantly, the two international organisations agreed that there was value in fostering a close relationship and that common interests would be better served through supportive and joint action at the international level.

Opportunities for joint activity that were identified in the Beijing Agenda include: multimedia, technology, resource sharing, ethics, convergence of standards, disaster preparedness control, preservation and conservation, international policy development, regional co-operation initiatives, training and education, legal matters, intellectual property and copyright, terminology, private archives/manuscripts and collection management.

At the meeting in China there were three keynote speakers and I was privileged to be one of these. While I appreciated the great honour associated with the invitation to play a role in this event, it was the process of researching and preparing my paper that was probably most rewarding. The Directors General of the National Library of Australia (Warren Horton) and the Australian Archives (George Nichols) both provided guidance.

It was during this preparatory period that it became clear that collaboration between the associations and organisations representing and employing archivists and librarians, as well as others with related skills, should be given some priority. Indeed the statement of purpose embedded in our new strategic plan (ALIA Strategic Plan 1997 — 2001, available from ALIA National Office) provides that 'ALIA will, for the benefit of the library and information community, unite those engaged or interested in the library and information sector'. Our promotion and communication goals include the development of relationships with other relevant organisations — such as the associations representing archivists. The publication of this issue of *inCite*

is one step in exploring the common interests between archivists and librarians.

On the domestic scene there are a number of areas where archives and libraries can benefit from co-operative action. The current review of the *Australian Archives Act 1983* by the Australian Law Reform Commission seeks comments from interested parties on a number of issues raised in a discussion paper (Issues Paper 19, ALRC). Many of these issues mirror the concerns of our members — privacy, preservation of digital records and standards for the creation, management and accessibility of records. ALIA is currently developing its submission to this review.

Our colleagues at the Australian Archives will have been buoyed by the announcement last month of a new home within the Parliamentary Triangle. The very famous East Block is just a stone's throw from the new Parliament House and is to be extensively refurbished to house the Archives. Archives administration and collections are currently dispersed in areas remote from the heart of the Capital and this prospective move will symbolise the importance of our archival collections to the nation.

John Metcalfe, one of our Association's founding fathers, saw the earliest libraries as 'what we now distinguish as archives' and supported a broad view of the profession to embrace library and archive management. For a variety of reasons the professions are now distinguished by separate professional associations and education and training regimes. Nonetheless, there remains much in common. Libraries and archives make an important contribution to our cultural, social and intellectual life. Metcalfe probably had both libraries and archives in mind when he wrote the following in 1945:

...if we are to progress as a people, if we are to survive, we need institutions which will ensure that we know the best that has been and is being thought and said, pictured and played, written and read by our people, and throughout the world, just so that we can turn upon stock notions and habits a stream of thought that is fresh, and free.

John Metcalfe, 'Cultural Institutions in the Australian Community: 'To Hell With Culture'', *Australian Quarterly* 17 (March 1945) quoted in an article by W Boyd Rayward, 'Central and other mysteries in librarianship: the writings of John Wallace Metcalfe', *The Australian Library Journal*, Vol 36, No 4, November 1987. ■