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Mr Terry Moran AO  
Advisory Group on Reform of Australian Government Administration  
Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet  
PO Box 6500  
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30 November 2009

Dear Mr Moran

Thank you for the opportunity to comment on the discussion paper *Reform of Australian Government Administration: Building the world's best public service*. As a member of the Executive Committee of the Australian Government Libraries Information Network (AGLIN), I submit the following submission on behalf of the network. Our comments have been developed in consultation with members of the AGLIN Executive and the membership at large.

Our submission is predicated on the fact that AGLIN libraries assist the Australian Public Service in accessing relevant, authoritative information in a timely manner to facilitate considered advice and evidence based decision making. Issues facing AGLIN libraries are identified and suggestions are made how improving library services will assist in building the world's best public service.

I trust you find this advice worthy of further consideration.

Yours sincerely

Kathy Stapleton  
Executive Member  
Australian Government Libraries Information Network

# **SUBMISSION**

## ***Reform of Australian Government Administration: Building the world's best public service***

### **Background**

The Australian Government Libraries Information Network (AGLIN) represents library and information services within the Australian Government. Members include all portfolio departments and many smaller agencies. AGLIN members are focussed on facilitating the provision of information to clients within the Australian Public Service (APS).

### **Government needs**

In April 2008, the Prime Minister articulated seven elements of the Government's vision for the future Australian public service in an address to heads of agencies and members of the Senior Executive Service. AGLIN libraries are well positioned to support the third element of this vision. Libraries provide core information required for the development of evidence-based policy making processes.

AGLIN libraries are staffed by information professionals. Librarians are expert at locating and identifying relevant, authoritative information and are able to conduct research, collect evidence, consult, collate the results and analyse them to produce the best and most relevant information into a meaningful tailored response. Library staff have a wide variety of skills and knowledge, with expertise in information management, content management, information architecture, research, librarianship, and knowledge management. Information professionals have the skills to contribute to an organisation's effective and efficient utilisation of information and knowledge. The outcome is to enable more informed choices about policy, operations, workflow, performance management, risk management, and overall decision-making.

### **Services**

Libraries are more than just books, journals and catalogues. In fact, libraries can be the centre of an agency's information and knowledge network. These libraries are dynamic knowledge management service centres, moving well beyond the ordering, receipt, authentication and circulation of published news, books and journals. AGLIN libraries have moved with varying degrees of support and success into the 21st century. These are exciting times, and the opportunities that are available to the APS are immense.

Senator Ursula Stephens in an October speech to the Australian Government Libraries Information Network Forum acknowledged that users of information need the guidance of librarians in not only tracking down the knowledge, but also in helping to quickly reduce it to the principle points that we need. Librarians are able to discern the veracity of documents and the integrity of different sources of information. With the increasing use of web 2.0 by Government, librarians as professionals in information management, can help devise new ways of capturing, archiving, accessing and capturing the knowledge that emerges from these new ways of consulting and interacting with Australian citizens.

APS departments and agencies are knowledge organisations and, as such, have a fundamental need for finding, using and delivering information in a myriad of ways and forms. AGLIN libraries can and have played a role in leveraging the enormous amount of information already housed within an agency and between the people who work within it.

### **Access to information**

Public sector agencies require accurate and timely information to support their decision making processes. It is imperative the information be relevant, authoritative and sourced in a cost effective manner. Library staff are adept at identifying the specific information needs of their agency, procuring the right resources to satisfy these needs and then providing that information to the appropriate work areas. Provided information is also refined to meet the needs of individual clients.

There is a widespread perception that almost everything is freely available on the Internet. This not true. Much authoritative material is published by commercial enterprises that charge for access to their resources. Freely available Australian Government information in many cases has a limited life on the Internet. Once publications are dated, they are removed – even though they are still relevant as historical documents.

While the National Library of Australia has responsibility for collecting the publishing output of individual departments and agencies, there is a limited mechanism for the ongoing retention of electronic publications. AGLIN libraries have a vital role in providing access to government publications in the public domain in both print and electronic formats. AGLIN libraries are also responsible for collating and maintaining agency reports and publications and ensuring their ongoing access and availability.

### **Cooperation**

Each department and agency is responsible for its own independent library service. While AGLIN facilitates cooperation and collaboration through networking and information sharing, results are limited. It would be beneficial to the whole of APS to have more collaborative unified library and information services. These could be across sectors, portfolios or the whole of government. Access to library and information should be available to all public servants wherever they may work and whatever position they hold.

Many AGLIN libraries benefit from the consortium deals and discounts that have been arranged with vendors. The Defence Library has worked with representatives from AGLIN to establish and maintain Defence Standing Offers (DSO) for Publications and Library Personnel.

Most AGLIN libraries provide and support each other with free inter-library loans and document delivery. AGLIN libraries also have access to wider networks such as Libraries Australia, which provide members with access to the collections of libraries throughout Australia and New Zealand. Staff in those departments and agencies without a library are unable to participate in this network, as they do not meet the criteria set out by the Copyright Act.

Individual library services could leverage off the benefits of greater collaboration and cooperation, while emphasising the targeted services and resources to meet the needs of their department or agency.

Specific areas that would benefit from a Whole of Government approach include:

- Tendering and negotiation for common purchases. Despite their success, the current DSO arrangements require the goodwill of Defence to arrange.
- Managing electronic resources by negotiating licensing arrangements.
- Establishing a single secure web portal to make common electronic resources easily accessible.
- Establishing government guidelines and/or standards for the preservation of government content by each agency including historical print publications and e-publications.
- Providing guidelines and funding support for the digitisation of 'significant' historical government publications deemed to be in the national interest.

## **Problems**

There is no cohesive view of library services across the APS. AGLIN recognises that the following issues affect the delivery of library services across the Whole of Government:

- Varied availability and standard of core library services.
- Poor understanding and definition of what services are available, required and delivered.
- No means for measuring effectiveness in delivering services.
- No minimum requirements or guidelines for the provision of library services.
- Poor mechanisms for co-ordinating and providing services on a Whole of Government basis.

These problems are compounded by the lack of correlation between agency needs, service effectiveness, staffing levels, and budget allocations.

Over the past ten years, library services have been cut to the point where new departments have been established without libraries or access to a suitable alternative. Some agencies have reduced or abolished their library services.

## **Recommendations**

With an increasing emphasis on online services, resourcing constraints and cultural and technological changes, it is time that the role of APS libraries in supporting the work of the APS be acknowledged and enhanced.

AGLIN requests that the Review considers or institutes a review mechanism to:

1. Determine and set minimum requirements and best practice library guidelines across the APS.
2. Investigate options for innovative governance, funding, staffing and support to allow for the provision of common services and resources across agencies or portfolios.
3. Review library services and resources which could be more effectively provided on a Whole of Government basis.