

COUNTRY PUBLIC LIBRARIES ASSOCIATION OF NEW SOUTH WALES

PO Box 90
Queanbeyan NSW 2620

The Secretary
House of Representatives Economics,
Finance and Public Administration Committee
Parliament House
CANBERRA ACT 2601

23rd July 2002

House of representatives Standing Committee on
Economics, Finance and Public Administration

Submission No: 35

Date Received: 24/7/02

Secretary: Burdell

Dear Secretary,

House of Representatives Inquiry into Cost Shifting onto Local Government

On behalf of the Country Public Libraries Association of New South Wales I am forwarding our submission to the House of Representatives Inquiry into Cost Shifting onto Local Government.

The Country Public Libraries Association represents the interests of rural, regional and remote public libraries in New South Wales. Our membership covers the 140 local government areas outside of metropolitan Sydney, and our members take a vital interest in improving public library services in New South Wales.

The CPLA wishes to highlight a number of areas where significant cost shifting to local government is occurring in relation to the delivery and provision of public library services.

Any enquiries in relation to our submission can be directed to the CPLA Secretary, Peter Conlon, phone (02) 6298 0298 or email peter.conlon@qcc.nsw.gov.au

Yours sincerely

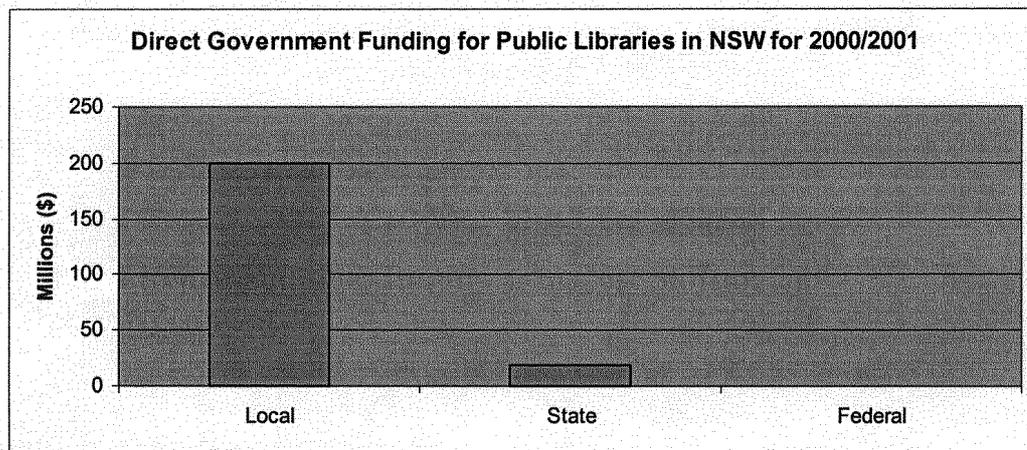
Cr Sue Whelan
CPLA Chair

House of Representatives Inquiry into Cost Shifting onto Local Government

Submission by the Country Public Libraries Association of New South Wales

Funding of Public Library Services

The current levels of funding for public library services provided by the different levels of government is illustrated in the following graph



State Government Funding

In New South Wales the contribution of the State Government to the funding of public libraries has declined sharply in real terms since 1980. The situation in relation to the state government spending on public libraries in NSW is clearly illustrated in the following table:

Year	Total State Government Expenditure	Total Local Government Expenditure
1980	\$ 8.5M (23.6%)	\$ 27.5M (73.4%)
1990	\$13.1M (12.6%)	\$ 90.9M (87.4%)
1998/99	\$16.7M (8.1%)	\$191.8M (91.9%)
2000/01	\$19.7M (8.9%) <i>(Actual)</i>	\$200.0M (91.1%) <i>(Estimate based on 1998/1999)</i>

The State Government contribution has declined dramatically in comparison with the local government contribution, which has increased by over \$170m per annum, a staggering 700% increase in 20 years. In the same period the State Government contribution has increased by only \$11.2m.

During the same period membership of New South Wales public libraries increased from 35% of total population to 49%. Thus, while New South Wales residents increased their use of public libraries by 40%, the State Government has sharply reduced its support for public libraries.

The CPLA has undertaken research into the funding provided by the state governments in Victoria and Queensland, the states most similar to NSW. The CPLA has taken care to compare the total actual expenditure by the three state governments on their public libraries.

State	Population 2001 Census	Total State Government Expenditure 2002-03*	Per Capita Expenditure 2002-03**
Victoria	4,644,950	\$ 26,165,800	\$5.65
Queensland	3,655,139	\$ 22,516,000	\$6.16
NSW	6,371,745	\$ 20,919,000	\$3.28

* Excludes the costs for the Public Libraries Branches/Divisions in the respective state libraries

** The per capita figures have been calculated by dividing the total state government spending on public libraries in each state by the total population of that state

The table above clearly demonstrates two major points which public libraries in NSW have been grappling with for many years:

1. The NSW State Government spends considerable less per capita on NSW public libraries in comparison with Victoria and Queensland, *and*
2. The NSW State Government spends less in actual dollar terms on its public libraries, compared with Victoria and Queensland, even though NSW has a significantly larger population and a large number of rural and remote communities.

This demonstrates a very clear case of how the NSW State Government has been shifting the costs of providing public library services to local government authorities. NSW has a larger population and a greater need for additional state government funds to address the needs of its communities, particularly in rural and regional parts of the state.

This cost shifting has occurred at a time when public libraries across NSW have taken a strong leadership role in providing access to new information and communication technologies for their communities. In many cases they are the major point of contact for many members of their communities to access information using the Internet and new online technologies. Public libraries and their local government authorities have worked together to ensure that regional and rural communities in particular are not left behind in having equitable access to print and online resources.

Rate-pegging for Local Government

Local government is subjected to annual rate-pegging by the state government, which places constraints on their ability to raise the funds needed locally. Rate-pegging exacerbates existing inequities in that those differences in levels of local government funding which were in place when rate-pegging was introduced are worsened (because percentages are dependant on the base figure). Thus already serious inequities are not only perpetuated, they grow and Councils are denied the means to redress the situation.

In regional NSW the average per capita funding by local government authorities is around \$27. This figure hides great discrepancies, however. Orange's per capita contribution, for instance hovers around \$40, while Wagga's is around \$17 and many are even lower.

This growing difference in funding means that many people are being seriously disadvantaged in their access to online and other services which in effect constitutes a structural disadvantage and discrimination for many local government areas.

Providing Communications Infrastructure and Support

The Federal Government has a vital responsibility in facilitating the Australian community to connect to and utilise the rapidly developing information technologies. The future prosperity and well-being of rural and regional Australia depends on having access to the new technologies so that these communities can participate fully in the new online and electronic economies of e-commerce and e-business. Federal Government funding and support for this vital has been limited and unco-ordinated, and has placed the onus and responsibility on local government to address the shortfall.

The quality and standard of telecommunications facilities throughout regional Australia is very variable, and the costs of accessing electronic information over the Internet or through other databases increase with distance from the metropolitan centres. This creates a double disadvantage for people living in regional areas where access to electronic information resources is erratic and must be paid for on a timed basis, whilst metropolitan users enjoy high quality access at local call rates.

Telecommunications Barriers

Internet Connectivity

Broadband Internet access choices are often very limited in regional areas. In metropolitan locations options can include ISDN, DDS, IP Broadband, ADSL, Frame Relay, Microwave etc. Generally in rural areas the only option is either ISDN or satellite. ISDN can be prohibitively expensive for most regional customers and unsuitable for home users. Satellite is often the only broadband option in regional areas but some services are not available via satellite because of the latency time (delay in signal sending and receiving). Furthermore it is not necessarily a cheap option. It will cost in the vicinity of \$77 per month with a 3GB limit and additional charges for usage above this rate. A dial-up connection and account must also be maintained for uploading information. On top of this there is a minimum installation charge of \$1,230 depending on geographic location. It is worth noting that rural areas pay significantly more for the installation than their metropolitan counterparts.

Two-way satellite does not require an additional dial-up connection but has similar limitations and increased costs. The reliability of the service is currently providing a challenge for Rurallink areas that have installed it.

ADSL is a more economical option but it is not available in smaller communities where it is most needed. Even if ADSL becomes available in regional areas the ISPs charge at higher rates in country areas than in metropolitan locations. The table below gives costs taken from the website of one ADSL supplier. It is evident that rural users will be paying substantially more than urban users. Note that ADSL is also limited by distance from the telephone exchange.

	Metro Monthly Access Fee	Rural Monthly Access Fee
Broadband 512v	26.95	39.95
Broadband 1500v	59.95	69.95
Broadband 256u	799	999
Broadband 512u	1598	1998
Broadband 1500u	3196	3996
Broadband 512/512v	250	299

Wide Area Networks

Public libraries are often in need of an affordable option for wide area networks and many rural local government areas have branches located many hours drive away. These wide area networks are essential if the library service wishes to provide online access to the library system. This has become an increasingly important issue as library software moves into data-rich structures that demand higher bandwidth for workable operating levels. ISDN is increasingly becoming available in these areas but is expensive and the cost increases with each telephone area boundary that is crossed. There is a risk that some libraries may have to revert to manual transactions simply because they cannot afford the associated telecommunications costs.

Phone Services

Local area phone calls disadvantage rural communities where the regional centre is often outside the local call area.

Online and Electronic Information Resources

While library material has predominantly been published in a paper-based format, this is currently changing at a rapid rate so that in the future significant collections of materials will exist as computer databases or electronic documents. In order to have access to information stored in electronic format it is necessary to have access to good quality telecommunication facilities and equipment. Many people in Australia, particularly those living outside of the major metropolitan areas, do not have ready or affordable access to high quality telecommunication facilities.

There has been a heavy shift by State & Federal government to provide their information, conduct business and communicate with the community over the Internet. This is particularly the case in rural areas where there are few government offices and Internet access in the home is not high. The result is a shift of costs to local government to provide Internet access to government services and information, including equipment costs, and the staff with the expertise to advise the public and the expert knowledge for accessing information on these government web sites.

Small rural and regional libraries provide a safe and friendly environment. They rely greatly on technology to communicate with the world for research, email, day to day library work as statistics, family history and more to cater for the needs not only of our local community but the international community e.g. our tourist industry and sharing information with others overseas for historical or environmental reasons. They require reliable and current technology and most importantly computer technicians who service our technology regularly.

We provide the support to these new technologies with training and troubleshooting with technical issues in our community. We are therefore meeting a social, educational and economic need in our communities for information provision be it via the Internet, CDROM, or paperbased. Public libraries have an expertise in packaging and distributing information to meet various needs - be it for a school student or a television crew doing a documentary. All this is funded by the local government.

Many people currently use our public library computers for word processing, which would indicate that many people do not own a computer, particularly in economically challenged areas, and rely on these service and facilities being freely available in their public libraries.

Support for Education and Students

Public libraries in New South Wales also play a vital role in providing information, research and other study resources to support the education of students at Primary and High schools, at TAFE and at Tertiary level. Recent studies and surveys clearly show that students are heavy users of public library resources, and every afternoon and evening during term they crowd into our public libraries. Open Learning institutions are actually referring their students to public libraries, and whilst they get the student fees and government assistance public libraries are not compensated.

Education is clearly the responsibility of the State and Federal governments. Local governments do not receive any compensation or additional resources for taking on this role of education support, even though it is clear that students would be severely disadvantaged if public libraries were to curtail or end these services.

National Library fees and charges for remote users

Another instance of cost shifting from the Federal Government to local government is in the charging of high fees for Inter-Library Loan services provided to public libraries by the National Library of Australia.

The National Library is funded by the Federal Government and has collections which are of great use to many Australians. If a person outside of Canberra wishes to use material held by the National Library, the means of doing so is by inter-library loan, the charges for which start at \$12 per item. The National Library is a major lender of material because of its large and unique collections, and the income generated from inter-library loans would be significant, and presumably could not be foregone without budgetary implications for the National Library.

For Australians of limited means living outside of Canberra there are few affordable opportunities to use the collections of the National Library unless their local public library has the resources to pay the current high charges imposed for inter-library loans. The reality is that many public library services cannot afford to pay these charges and costs without a detrimental impact on their already limited budgets and resources.

Services for People with Special Needs

Public libraries provide a broad range of services to meet the demand from people in their communities with special needs, for example the elderly, people with disabilities, people from Non-English speaking backgrounds, youth, parents, and Aboriginal people. Many of the resources and equipment required to meet these needs are expensive and specialised, and public libraries do not receive additional funding from other levels of government to assist them in providing these vital services.

Unless State and Federal governments contribute more funding to public library services in New South Wales there is a very real concern that this will lead to the reduction of services and in extreme cases the closure of libraries, particularly in country and remote areas. There is also an increasing concern that as Local Governments assume more and more of the costs for public libraries that they may decide that a user pays system should apply to their libraries and that the very philosophy of free, fair and equitable access to local libraries could be at risk.

Public Libraries as a Gateway for their communities

The public libraries network has continued to work against these disadvantages and has achieved the following with inadequate funding from state government and no direct funding from the Federal Government:

Public libraries have developed a well-established and sophisticated communications and co-operative network.

This network infrastructure has been developed over many years and has facilitated the rapid and smooth introduction of online and internet services into communities who would otherwise have little access to the new technologies. Public libraries in rural and regional areas work together very effectively in sharing expertise, resources and innovative ideas and providing professional support to each other.

Public Library staff provide access to the Internet and online information and offer a high level of skills, experience and expertise to their community

The staff in public libraries are highly trained in locating and retrieving information from a wide variety of sources, including the Internet and online sources. They are very familiar with using and accessing online technologies. In addition, public libraries have access to a broad range of professional support from Regional libraries and from their State Libraries to supplement their own local resources and levels of experience and expertise.

Public libraries are tailored to meet the needs of their individual and regional communities

Public libraries have a close relationship of trust and understanding with their communities. They tailor their services and resources to meet the needs of their individual communities, and they have a detailed knowledge and understanding of their communities.

Public Libraries provide access to training and support in using new technologies

Public libraries have been in the vanguard of introducing Internet and online information technologies and services for their communities. Access is provided free of charge or at a very low rate. The libraries work together through the CPLA and CPLG and their State Libraries to ensure that they remain abreast of the rapid developments in information technologies and their delivery. As well as providing access their staff provide training and support to members of their communities who are unfamiliar with or who are reluctant to use the new technologies.

Public Libraries have established relationships of trust and understanding with their communities

Public libraries are regarded as neutral, safe and unthreatening places by their communities. There is a high level of trust and the communities feel confident that their public libraries are working to provide access to the best possible information sources without bias, influence or commercial motives. Public libraries are not-for-profit institutions and play a key role in building and maintaining social capital at the local level.

Public Libraries provides expertise to support the up-skilling of the community in accessing and using new technologies

The experience, expertise and training of public library staff means that they are an obvious resource to increase the skills of the community in accessing online technologies and becoming familiar with e-commerce.

Links in with the strong support networks provided through CPLA and CPLG, Regional Libraries and the State Library, and builds on NSW.net and Vicnet and new initiatives such as Rural Link.

Public libraries have developed strong support networks at the state level and have demonstrated a strong ability to co-operate and work together in a dynamic and effective way. A significant number of online projects, such as NSW.net and now Rural Link, have proven that public libraries are ready and able to embrace these new electronic resources and to make them available to their communities in a readily accessible manner.

With adequate funding from State and Federal governments the public libraries network is well placed to maximise community benefit from the required additional funding.