

The Secretary
 House of Representatives Economics, Finance and Public Administration
 Committee
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The Richmond-Upper Clarence Regional Library comprises the Council areas of Richmond Valley Council and Kyogle Council. It currently has over 12,000 registered patrons, which is approximately 40% of the population. The Regional Library and the two councils are members of the Country Public Libraries Association.

The Regional Library wishes to highlight a number of areas where significant cost shifting is occurring in relation to public library services.

Funding of Public Library Services

In New South Wales the contribution of the State Government to the funding of public libraries has declined dramatically 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%)	\$200.0M (91.1%)
	<i>(Actual)</i>	<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.

The table below 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.

State	Population June 2000*	Total State Government Expenditure 2000-01**	Per Capita Expenditure 2000-01#
Victoria	4,765,856	\$ 24,161,000	\$5.07
Queensland	3,566,356	\$ 20,304,000	\$5.69
NSW	6,463,455	\$ 19,670,000# #	\$3.04

From **Population by Age and Sex**, June 2000, ABS publication 3201.0

** 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 NSW state government expenditure for 2000-01 includes :

1. \$2.5M provided from the Department of Information Technology & Management for the NSW.net project,
2. \$0.5M provided to improve library collections across the State,
3. \$ 0.5M provided in additional recurrent funding f

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 NSW.

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.

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. 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.

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.

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.

The public libraries network has continued to work against these disadvantages and has achieved the following with little or 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 have a high level of skills, experience and expertise

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. 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. Federal and state government is making information available electronically, in preference to hard copy. The cost of implementing this for the public to access successfully

is being born by local government and public libraries. Libraries provide IT infrastructure facilities and user education so the public can access this material - this cost is also currently born solely by libraries and their councils

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. Equity of access to information is a social obligation of Governments, and libraries - this community significance should be recognized in monetary and social terms. ABS - statistical concepts - support given to libraries better than many other departments - still training of public, and response to majority of queries undertaken by libraries and their staff at their cost in time, effort and money. Regional libraries are faced with different solutions within their regions for

accessing information - IT infrastructure, Communication links and providing training. Other issues include equity of costing over a disparate population base, variability of infrastructure, range of clients, range of physical requirements of clients, census demographics - regional libraries need ability to cater for change ahead of actuality - not currently possible.

Equity issues - libraries have a social obligation to cater for the disadvantaged - government should acknowledge this and recompense libraries for undertaking this role.

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. Governments are negating responsibility for obtaining the information once it is available online. Registration of ABN is done via libraries and Internet access - a government service budgeted within a department - cost partially borne by libraries - no reimbursement.

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 \$13.20 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.

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.

Government departments should include the above Costings in their budget for any dissemination of information - and these monies should then be disseminated to libraries [outsourcing this training by the department should be easily costed - this is the minimum which should be distributed to libraries]

Yours sincerely

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