

***Senate Environment, Communications, Information  
Technology and the Arts Reference Committee***

**Inquiry into the role of libraries in the online environment**

Submission by

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## ***Online multilingual and multicultural library services and service provision to CALD communities***

The internet and access to online resources is having a profound effect on the provision of public library services. New services utilizing online resources have developed. These online services are English language based.

Australian public libraries helped pioneer library services designed for culturally and linguistically diverse communities. Many library services across the country provide collections, services and programs in a range of community languages.

Multicultural library services are often considered as special or discrete library services. Often decisions relating to these services are taken in isolation to other parts of a public library service. This has led to a situation where libraries are able to provide much more sophisticated and extensive online services in English. Electronic multicultural services are slowly developing and are still at an early stage of development.

Two IFLA conferences in 1997 and 2001 have begun to explore the issues relating to technology and multicultural library services. Key projects have developed that explore some of the possibilities of the internet for providing access to multilingual information.

Notable among these were FINFO [<http://www.finfo.dk/>] in Denmark, Queens Public Library's WorldLinQ [<http://www.worldlinq.org/>] in the United States, and the Victorian project, Open Road [<http://www.openroad.vic.gov.au/>]. These projects can be considered as prototypes. They illustrate some of the potentials and pitfalls of providing access to multilingual information.

They are initial steps in developing electronic multicultural library services (eMCLS). There is an ongoing international dialogue about the nature, requirements and scope of the next generation of eMCLS. Current projects are limited in their scope and are not capable of providing the level of access to online information resources that would benefit and enrich our culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) communities. Multilingual versions of many of the basic tools used in the location and provision of English language online resources need to be developed.

The development and enhancement of multilingual public internet access services (MPAS) and electronic multicultural library services (eMCLS) is crucial to the role of libraries as gateways to multilingual information and resources. Consequently such services are key elements in improving and extending services to our CALD communities.

Access to multilingual online resources is provided via mediated access or by direct access from the end user. Mediated access involves a health care worker, social worker, librarian, settlement officer, etc. locating the online information resource and providing the information to a client.

Most online government multilingual information uses a mediated access model. Some websites use a direct access model, but due to the costs of multilingual information provision mediated access models are more common.

Public libraries provide a unique public internet access location that can provide mediated access as well as assisted and unassisted direct access.

### **(a) CURRENT DEMAND FOR PUBLIC INFORMATION SERVICES**

The level of usage of the internet by CALD communities varies from community to community. Usage within a community is affected by a range of factors, including: level of literacy in first language, level of IT literacy, average age, educational background, economic factors, personal interest, and availability of information through other media.

Larger, more established communities have access to information through multiple media including radio, newspapers, magazines and television. Public library services with large CALD communities provide collections to their largest language groups. Library users may have access to books, magazines, newspapers, audio cassettes, CDs, videos, VCDs and DVDs in their own language.

There are many competing media that are accessible to some communities. Ethnic radio broadcasting is often considered the most important medium for provision of information to CALD communities.

Anecdotal evidence suggests that the level of usage of public internet access within libraries by CALD clients is proportionate to the level of usage by English language clients.

The internet becomes a crucial medium for accessing information in those smaller or emerging languages that do not have ready access to other media. State and public libraries have constraints on their resources, which place practical limitations on the number of language collections they can develop. The internet provides libraries with an opportunity to provide services in languages the libraries could not provide traditional collections for.

The Survey of multicultural services in New South Wales Public Libraries 2001 has shown a relatively low level of use of technology in the provision of services to CALD clients. There was, however, a high level of interest identified by libraries generally in using technology more effectively and, in particular, the internet, to provide access to services, information and resources to CALD clients.

The key items limiting the potential use of the internet to access multilingual government information are: the lack of awareness in the CALD communities to the availability of this information, lack of IT literacy within sections of the communities, and the lack of tools for locating online multilingual government information.

Public libraries tend to provide access to the languages that come pre-configured with the operating systems and web browser the libraries have installed. On a national

level, there is wide disparity in the operating systems and web browsers used for the provision of public internet access. Windows 95, 98, ME, NT4, 2000 and XP can all be found in use in libraries across Australia. Web browsers in use include Netscape Communicator 4.0x through to Netscape Communicator 4.7x, Internet Explorer 4, 5, 5.5 and 6 and Netscape 6/Mozilla.

Each web browser has a different range of languages it can support. Each operating system supports a different range of languages. The general rule of thumb is that newer operating systems have much support a greater range of languages. Windows 2000 and XP provide major qualitative and quantitative differences in the support, when compared with the older operating systems. The best (but little used) operating system for multilingual support is currently Windows XP.

The choices that libraries make in their choice of operating systems and web browsers for public access workstations have major consequences for the range of languages that are available to their local communities. Often these decisions are based on licensing and hardware upgrade costs rather than the needs of the community. Public libraries have limited resources for purchasing and upgrading software, operating systems and hardware. Unfortunately, the economic pressures have resulted in many public libraries being unable to provide access to the most current language technologies.

Another factor limiting access to both online resources and traditional library collections, is the lack of support for multilingual records in many existing library catalogues.

## **(b)    RESPONDING TO CHANGING INFORMATION NEEDS**

A number of initiatives have evolved within New South Wales, Queensland and Victoria that attempts to address some of the issues presented by multilingual use of the internet.

### **The Open Road**

The Open Road project was developed to assist Victorian public libraries to extending their public internet access in order to provide multilingual public internet access to their culturally and linguistically diverse clients.

A number of strategies were adopted to assist the public libraries:

Computers purchased as part of a statewide rollout of public access workstations by Libraries Online (Vicnet) were pre-configured for multilingual web browsing.

A training program was developed and provided onsite for each public library service in Victoria. The focus of the staff training programs were to provide public library staff with the basic skills and knowledge they would need to set up their public access computers for multilingual web browsing. A training module was developed to

provide library staff with skills in assisting their clients in locating and accessing web pages in languages other than English.

A small web directory was developed to provide access to a selection of quality online resources in twelve community languages in a range of Latin and non-Latin scripts.

The development of MCL-net, a web-site providing access to information and resources about multicultural library services.

### **NSW.net**

The State Library of New South Wales' NSW.net initiative manages and operates an ISDN network providing subsidized internet access and free or discounted subscriptions to online information resources to member local government councils and public libraries across New South Wales. Currently, NSW.net only provides access to English language based commercial online resources. The Gulliver Consortium provides similar access to commercial online English language resources in Victoria.

NSW.net has also distributed computers to libraries to act as public access workstations. These computers were pre-configured for multilingual web surfing in common community languages in New South Wales.

### **Multicultural Bridge**

The State Library of Queensland is currently developing a multilingual web-site providing information about public library services in a range of community languages. The site contains resources that the public libraries can use to promote their library services to their local CALD communities.

### **Current status**

Each state is currently working in isolation, reinventing the wheel each time they need to provide access to new languages. Resources, knowledge and skills are developing in isolation. This is a trend that is also observable on the international arena.

## **(c) STRATEGIES TO ENHANCE THE USE & DISTRIBUTION OF INFORMATION RESOURCES**

The key issues in enhancing the availability and use of multilingual information resources are:

- the multilingual content infrastructure development;
- internet accessible library catalogues capable of correctly displaying resources in their own language;
- development of bilingual and multilingual metadata along with harvesting protocols to enhance access to multilingual information published by federal and state governments;

- training and support; and
- access to commercial multilingual online resources.

### **Content infrastructure**

Two types of tools need to be developed to enhance access to multilingual online information. These tools should be developed cooperatively between key stakeholders across Australia. One set of tools should be designed to provide a public gateway to multilingual internet resources. The second set of tools should be designed to assist in the provision of multilingual and multicultural reference services.

#### ***Public portal:***

In order to enhance public access to multilingual information, it is necessary to develop a public portal. The portal would provide three key functions:

- Provide access to search engines for each language supported by the portal;
- Provide access to a directory of internet resources in that language. This directory could be populated with data from the Open Directory Project, allowing access to a large set of non-English web resources. The ODP data is freely available, and is the basis of many different specialist directories. ODP data is used by services such as the Google Directory.
- Provide access to government and community information available in that language (via searching and a directory). This data would be developed through automated harvesting of metadata from key government and community websites.
- An entry point to commercial non-English language online resources purchased by libraries for use by their clients. Resources could be acquired via a consortium of public libraries. Such resources could include online access to archives of major international non-English newspapers, ebook collections, full-text databases, etc.

#### ***Reference services portal:***

A portal needs to be cooperatively developed on a national level that would provide access to:

- Key resource location tools for each language, including digital libraries, full text databases, ebook archives, and subject specialist directories. These sites would be selected by language specialist reference librarians to be used as a tool for public library staff to locate information in other languages when they have non-English information requests from their clients.
- Professional development resources on multicultural library services and self-paced training resources on the provision of electronic multicultural library services.

#### ***Training and support***

A cooperative approach to the development of support and training services for public and state libraries needs to be developed.

Current knowledge of language technology and multilingual web site development issues exists within key stakeholder agencies but access to the knowledge and skills is limited. Mechanisms and resources need to be developed to share the knowledge and skills on a national level.

Additionally, it would be advisable to develop training manuals for public libraries that offer public internet training. These training manuals should be developed for specific community languages, addressing the needs of those languages. The manuals should be translated into the community languages.

**(d) USING LIBRARIES TO MEET COMMUNITY DEMANDS FOR PUBLIC INFORMATION**

It is necessary to make public access workstations more language friendly. The current reality is that there is little standardization of public access workstations. Language support differs from library service to library service. Some libraries only provide the ability to view multilingual resources. Other libraries provide software to type in languages.

The software available for typing in other languages may differ from library to library, forcing the public to learn different ways of typing in their language at different libraries.

It is also necessary to make government and community information published in other languages accessible. Currently, there is no way of searching efficiently and effectively for non-English language material.

The development of standards for use of bilingual metadata (in English and language of the resource) in government non-English web pages and electronic resources. This should be combined with the development of a harvesting protocol, which would make it possible to harvest the bilingual metadata and allow searching or directory browsing of government information by multilingual portals.

**(e) ROLES OF GOVERNMENTS, THE CORPORATE SECTOR AND LIBRARIES TO ENSURE EFFECTIVE USE OF LIBRARIES AS A PRIMARY INFORMATION RESOURCE IN THE ONLINE ENVIRONMENT**

**Bilingual Metadata standards and harvesting protocols**

Federal and State governments, the National Library and state libraries need to develop a bilingual and multilingual metadata standard and metadata harvesting

protocol that would allow the development of online tools to assist the public in locating multilingual government and community online information.

### **Content Infrastructure**

The Federal and State governments in conjunction with the state libraries should develop a content infrastructure (software and standards) to enable the development of Public and professional resources to assist in the use of the internet in other languages. State libraries and public libraries should cooperatively develop the content once a suitable content infrastructure is available.

### **Support and Training**

State governments in conjunction with state libraries need to cooperatively develop a technical support and training infrastructure that would empower library services to develop and enhance their electronic multicultural library services.

### **Multilingual Public Internet Access Workstations (MPAWS)**

Standards need to be developed for the provision of multilingual public internet access. Federal and state governments should consult with ethnic community organizations, state libraries and public libraries on the requirements for MPAWs.