



Dear Sir,

On behalf of the Richmond-Tweed Regional Library I write to draw your attention to the vital role public libraries play in providing equity of access to Australians of all ages to on-going opportunities for Life-Long Learning.

The Richmond-Tweed Regional Library provides public library services to four constituent Local Government Councils on the far North Coast of New South Wales: Ballina Shire, Byron Shire, Lismore City, and Tweed Shire, with a combined population of approximately 190,000. This library service provides eleven static Branch Libraries, and one internet-enabled mobile library, which together serve a combined registered membership of over 87,700.

Australia has a network of 1,510 public libraries, all of which provide informal, welcoming, and trusted resource centres freely accessible and free of charge to all members of their communities. The services these libraries provide include:

1. Free access to print materials, including books, magazines, newspapers, Reports etc etc., suitable for all ages from young children to students of the University of the Third Age.
2. Free access to computers and the internet, and to on-line information resources.
3. Access to safe and reliable study areas, in many cases open both during day time and in the evenings, and also at weekends.
4. Access to experienced information professionals.
5. Access to informal classes, free of charge, on basic computer and internet skills.
6. Access through the medium of inter-library loans to study resources from libraries of all types.
7. Study space, together with appropriate supervision to enable students to sit written examinations for educational courses, in remote locations.

This vital infrastructure urgently requires financial support from the Commonwealth Government if it is to maintain its role as an informal provider of education. In New South Wales the public library service is funded 90% by Local Government, and 10% by State Government (the lowest level of State Government funding in Australia).

The Richmond-Tweed Regional Library therefore requests that the Committee of Enquiry:

- 1) Recognises the vital role that public libraries throughout Australia play in supporting Life Long Learning
- 2) Encourages the New South Wales State Government to provide adequate library funding, at least commensurate with the National average of 22% of total costs.
- 3) Supports the provision of adequate Commonwealth Government funding, at the minimum level of \$1 per capita, to public libraries Australia- wide to enable them to maintain their role as education providers.

Access to, and encouragement of Life-Long Learning is a prerequisite if Australia is to become the "Clever Country" Australia's network of public libraries could be a vital resource in maintaining awareness and supporting life-long learning opportunities, a relatively modest investment of \$20 million in Commonwealth Funds would be effectively leveraged by this network to deliver life-long learning programmes to communities Australia-wide. I encourage the Committee to realise this opportunity. I would welcome the opportunity to give evidence at any public hearing.

Yours faithfully,

Martin Field

(Martin Field)
Regional Library Manager