

# Submission

to

Senate Employment, Workplace Relations and Education  
References Committee

## **Inquiry into the progress and future direction of life-long learning**

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**Submission no:** 6

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7 June 2004

The Secretary  
Senate Employment, Workplace Relations  
And Education References Committee  
Suite SG.52, Parliament House  
CANBERRA ACT 2600

enquiries refer  
**Paul Hickey**  
in reply please quote

**Library Funding**



Dear Sir / Madam

### **Senate Enquiry – Progress and Future Direction of Life Long Learning**

On behalf of the Ballina Shire Council I wish 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 Ballina Shire Council is a member of the Richmond-Tweed Regional Library (RTRL). The RTRL provides public library services to four councils on the far north coast of New South Wales. The four councils are Ballina, Byron Shire, Lismore City, and Tweed Shire, with a combined population of approximately 190,000.

The RTRL provides eleven static branch libraries, and one internet-enabled mobile library, which together serve a combined registered membership of over 87,700. The Ballina Shire includes three of the static branch libraries.

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, suitable for all ages from young children to students of the University of the Third Age
2. Free access to computers and the internet
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

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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 Ballina Shire Council, as a member of the RTRL, 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.

I look forward to the Committee's favourable review of these issues.

Yours faithfully



Paul Hickey  
**Group Manager**  
**Corporate Services**