

## State Library of Victoria

Public Libraries 2020 Summit – 6 March 2006

E nga mana, E nga reo, E nga iwi

Tena koutou, tena koutou katoa

### Section 1 – Introduction and background

I am delighted to be here today to outline some of my thoughts about what I think is a quiet revolution going on over the other side of the Tasman with New Zealand libraries of all kinds, but particularly in the context of today's discussions in the public libraries of New Zealand.

I want to share with you what we are thinking and why I think the public library sector has been amazingly strategic in responding to the challenges of the digital revolution and next generation thinking. I hope these reflections will be useful in informing your discussions as you develop a blueprint for the public libraries in Victoria which will guide your activities over the next few years.

Let me start with a personal story to illustrate what enormous opportunities are extended to this generation of public libraries. I grew up in the country in the Hunter Valley in New South Wales. Let's go back to the 1970s (slide 1). My father was a country vet and my mother had a great love of the arts, particularly music and art. They were both enquiring, intelligent people but had none of the information sources available to them that we have today. Sydney University was the only vet school in those days and provided the only research library in Australia that supported Dad's research interests. My mother loved opera and we regularly met the train from

Sydney to pick up opera librettos from the State Library of New South Wales (Slide 2). Imagine if my parents lived in the knowledge-led world of 2006! They would have delighted in the opportunities extended to them. The point of telling you this story is that it is not all that long ago, and if we were imagining next generation library services for them 30 years ago we would probably be a long way short of what has actually happened today. So it is a real challenge for us when we are thinking of next generation services – we can imagine and explore possible scenarios but the truly depressing realisation is that we really don't know!

Let me now take you across the Tasman to share with you what we are thinking about at the moment. It is anything but gloom and doom. It has been a wonderful, amazing time for the libraries of New Zealand generally but particularly New Zealand's public libraries. I think there is something in the water in New Zealand that makes our best public libraries world leaders. Of course, like Australia, it is patchy and there are issues of distance and geography, broadband coverage etc which impact negatively on some of our smaller public libraries. Notwithstanding this, there are some wonderful libraries. Why is this?:

- Why do a very high percentage of Kiwis use their public libraries;
- Why in a 2003 Statistics New Zealand (Slide Public Libraries) survey did kiwis rate reading number one and visiting their public library number two as their favoured cultural activities?
- Why were seven public library buildings short-listed for architectural awards in 2004 with two public libraries – Paraparaumu Public Library and South Christchurch Library - awarded prestigious NZIA Supreme Awards?

It is difficult to give a single answer to these questions. However what I will do is start to unbundle what we have been thinking about in the last few years so you can make sense of why we are making the decisions we are.

A couple of contextual comments first:

The National Library of New Zealand does not have statutory oversight of the public libraries of New Zealand. The NLNZ is mandated to lead national frameworks that benefit all New Zealand libraries and to advise the New Zealand government on national and international trends. However we are not responsible for public libraries.

Therefore any collaboration between the NLNZ and the public libraries of New Zealand is entirely of our own making – we just make it happen.

Public libraries of New Zealand have been very, very smart in how they are positioning themselves for the future and from the NLNZ perspective they are very easy to work with.

My own view is that there are some great leaders in the profession in New Zealand. Allison Dobbie, Auckland City Libraries, Sue Sutherland (now head of Policy & Information Democracy at the NLNZ), Chris Szekely, Manukau City, Jane Hill, Wellington City Libraries – are just a few of the names who I admire so much. We get on well and have 'got over' the big brother, little sister relationship between the National Library and public libraries and any old tensions between central and local government.

We have also done a great deal of thinking about the future and this is the purpose of today's seminar. Personally I am sure about nothing. However I do think any

absolute predictions and positions are likely to turn to custard! The future, we think, is not about absolutes, it is a time of “both” “and” (Slide showing “and”)

eg     Print **and** digital  
          physical **and** virtual experience  
          local **and** international  
          high tech **and** high touch

Personally I am deeply suspicious of future scenarios which take a single slice of anything – in my view it just isn’t as simple as this. I wish it were.

Let me now give several examples of public library developments in New Zealand in 2005 so you can see what I am talking about. After I do this I will draw out the themes which I think may be relevant to your future thinking here in Victoria. I have provided links to each of the projects in the appendix of this paper rather than describing them in detail here.

While the National Library doesn’t have any direct responsibility for public libraries, in New Zealand we do have a political climate which is highly conducive to collaboration. The NLNZ is a government department in its own right with its own Minister. In the last five years the public service in New Zealand has undergone a radical transformation. We are no longer encouraged to work in departmental silos, and talk about joined up thinking, pan government solutions and Ministry clusters. There is a desire for central government to be far more coherent and understandable to the people of New Zealand. All of this development encourages (slide 6) collaboration and of course libraries have been collaborating for years – so the political environment is right. Of course all of this is complex and as I talk about New

Zealand's Digital Strategy, you will see just how many relationships the NLNZ is managing.

I want to get down to some really concrete developments but see these in the context of a small, creative, agile, smart country where there is a 'can do' attitude.

The first truly exciting development came in 2003 when the NLNZ was the New Zealand government's lead agency at the World Summit on the Information Society in Geneva. New Zealand's Digital Strategy was directly related to the outcomes of the World Summit and in May 2005 the Minister for Information Technology and Communications, the Hon David Cunliffe, launched New Zealand's Digital Strategy. I have given you the links to the Strategy and do this because it is difficult to understand some of the more strategic developments in New Zealand public libraries without understanding this context. The Digital Strategy, in many respects, is a clone of LIANZA's National Information Strategy, so we are beginning to see just how influential the library profession has been in crafting New Zealand's digital future.

Some of you will have heard me talk about the three Cs framework in the Digital Strategy before. Briefly the 3Cs stand for (slide7)

- Connected – A country must be wired with ubiquitous broadband infrastructure
- Content – There will need to be useful content filling the broadband pipes providing access to information important to all aspects of New Zealanders' lives
- Confidence – A country may be wired with a variety of content filling the broadband pipes. However if citizens are not literate digitally, literate with

access to ICTs, then they are disenfranchised from the digital world around them

Content and Confidence are really the playgrounds of public libraries in New Zealand's context.

Embedded in NZ's Digital Strategy is the National Content Strategy (NCS) and it may be worthwhile to talk about this now. The NLNZ is the lead government agency for the NCS and currently we are working with 14 other government departments with an interest in content and the creative content industries.

We are taking a comprehensive view of content (slide 8 Content Strategy)  
(slide 9 on Strategy's 5 elements)

Section 2 – Collaborative Projects (see accompanying notes)

Describing collaborative projects to illustrate the strategic importance of collaboration in the library and information sector.

National Digital Heritage Archive

Matapihi

AnyQuestions

EPIC

SCIS

What I would like you to notice here is that these are illustrations of a library profession that has a taste for being very, very strategic. We are filling the connectivity pipes of the Digital Strategy with quality content, particularly NZ content. We are building NZ Online.

All of these projects have required extraordinary collaboration and, as one cynic recently said “collaboration is hard – it is an unnatural act between non-consenting adults!” But we are getting good at it.

### Section 3 - Summary

I have taken you on a very fast jaunt through what is happening across the Tasman.

I hope you have found this story both inspiring and very do-able. At its simplest, all it has taken is

- An inspired vision
- An ability to embrace ambivalence rather than absolutes (both “and”)
- A can-do attitude with a willingness to work through the knotty issues of collaboration
- A philosophy of joined-up government with a “no wrong door” attitude to accessing services
- Leadership – inspired leadership in the public library sector
- A National Library willing to step up to the plate and provide leadership in developing national frameworks that benefit all New Zealand libraries.

### Step 4 - The Next Steps

The next six months will be telling for us – the Public Libraries Strategic Framework will be launched in a few weeks by the Minister and after a period of consultation and a nationwide summit it is likely to provide the blueprint for public libraries in New Zealand over the next decade. We are doing much the same futures planning as you are today.

At the end of March the National Content Strategy – Delivering NZ Online cabinet paper will be complete and heading for a nation-wide launch in December.

I think the library profession in New Zealand can be proud of its strategic input into New Zealand's digital future. I will end with an overview of those collaborative projects outlined earlier and show their strategic fit with the Digital Strategy NZ Online. It's not a bad effort for three years' thinking – I have a feeling that it has really just begun. Watch for the development in New Zealand of the New Zealand People's Network in the next few months as we position the public libraries of New Zealand as the citizens ICT hub.

I want to finish by laying down a challenge for you. Just in case any of you are thinking that this kind of development could never happen in Victoria. You have been trailblazers in thinking strategically about the future – Vicnet was an inspired vision and set the trend for much of our joined-up thinking in the 90's. You have great leaders here and much of what I have talked about in NZ is about having an audacious vision. Remember LIANZA's National Information Strategy led to in part to NZ's Digital Strategy. None of us can predict the future but I believe we must imagine possible scenarios and develop an inspired vision for the future so we know how to act beyond the "now". I will look at the outcomes of this seminar with interest.

No reira tena tatou katoa.