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## An Afternoon at the National Library of Australia

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On the afternoon of Friday 5th July ANZTLA Conference delegates spent a stimulating afternoon at the National Library of Australia.

Roxanne Missingham, Assistant Director General, Resource Sharing Division had prepared a program that concentrated on new services for accessing resources in Australian libraries and on the Internet, and gave a practical demonstration of some of the issues involved in the preservation of printed materials in the 21st century. A major focus of the afternoon was the Library's role in cooperative activities with other libraries.

Roxanne introduced the afternoon with an overview of the NLA's role and responsibilities. Most notable of these is Kinetica (the national database of material held in Australian libraries) ([www.nla.gov.au/kinetica](http://www.nla.gov.au/kinetica)). Roxanne acknowledged the practical difficulties that prevent many smaller libraries from participating fully in Kinetica, and mentioned the use of ILANET as an alternative source of Kinetica records (<http://www.ilanet.net.au/new.shtml>). She also spoke of the CASL consortium - a consortium of Australian National, State and Territory libraries formed for the purpose of acquiring cost-effective access to commercial electronic information resources.

Through this consortium the CASL libraries are able to provide online access to a wide range of Australian online resources in public affairs, business, health, literature and other areas (<http://www.caslconsortium.org/>). As ANZTLA members know, consortial deals are complex and demanding to negotiate, but they frequently are the only avenues by which libraries can provide access to electronic services.

Erica Ruthven, Manager, Digitisation Program at the NLA described some of the digitisation programs in which the Library is currently involved. The Library has been digitising images since 1995 but the program has significantly accelerated in 2002.

At the end of June 2002, images of 70,000 items were available, including photographs, postcards, cartoons, drawings, maps, sheet music and manuscript material. All material to be digitised is individually catalogued and the catalogue records display on both Kinetica and the NLA's catalogue.

Erica spoke of the process and technology involved in digitisation (including whether to scan or use a digital camera), and of the significance of the standards that have been developed.

Major digitisation projects include PictureAustralia and MusicAustralia (both collaborative ventures with other major institutions) and the digitised map collections. (For further information, see [www.nla.gov.au/dsp](http://www.nla.gov.au/dsp), and [www.nla.gov.au/digicoll](http://www.nla.gov.au/digicoll)).

As has become evident, ever-increasing amounts of information are being made available via the Internet (and not necessarily ever appearing in print format). As part of its role in ensuring that Australians will have access to a comprehensive record of Australian history and creative endeavour now and in the future, the Library decided in 1996 that it needed to address the issue of long-term access to online publications.

Margaret Phillips, (Manager Digital Archiving) introduced the Conference delegates to Pandora - an archive of Australian online publications copied with the

publishers' permission and preserved and made available for the future. The State libraries, and ScreenSound Australia are also partners in Pandora. The outcome to which Pandora is working is a national collection of Australia's online publications. (<http://pandora.nla.gov.au/index.html/>).

Following afternoon tea, Bet Dracoulis (Director, Reader Services) moved us back to the client focus of the Library's operations. She spoke of both the services available for clients who are physically present in the library and also of the increasing sophistication of services for clients who are not.

Bet pointed out that 99% of the Library's collection is in closed stacks, and therefore improvements to access to the stacks are highly beneficial to clients.

In May 2001 electronic request slips were introduced: registered clients use swipe cards to order from the stacks. The outcome has been a 12% increase in use of the collection after a trend to decline over a number of years.

More recently the library has been extending the services it provides online. Email

has become a major access tool for many clients. However Bet reported a trial being conducted of a fully online reference service.

*(Since July, this service—Ask us—a pilot collaborative service provided by Australian, national, state and territory libraries, has now become available via the Library's web page. Without any publicity, it has attracted a huge response. <http://www.nla.gov.au/infoserv/askus.html>. NC).*

Finally Lydia Preiss (Preservation) gave us a guided tour of the Library's Preservation laboratories. We spoke to conservators and inspected works undergoing different kinds of preservation according to not just their condition but their identified importance.

The afternoon was packed with events and speakers. It gave the conference participants an overview of the NLA's services, and also gave us an appreciation of key issues in providing a modern library service utilizing the resources of the nation. It was a generous contribution to the Conference by the staff of the National Library of Australia.

