

SWITCH: Public Libraries in a Changing Environment

2009 NSW Public Libraries Conference & Exhibition Output Statement



Key Facts about the NSW Public Library Sector

1. NSW public libraries:

- Generate over \$4 of real economic benefit and \$3 of real economic activity for every dollar invested.
- Contribute to 5 key areas of the NSW State Plan and support and enable NSW State Government initiatives including the NSW Premier's Reading Challenge and communities' ability to access Australian and State Government Agency websites and information.

2. 372 public library delivery points in NSW provide services and access to over 50% of NSW's now 7.1 million population (which is one third of Australia's population).

3. Visits to NSW public libraries increased by 17.5% over the past five years and notably in the last two years during the GFC.

4. Over 90% of the annual funding for NSW public libraries is provided by Local Government, with the remainder provided by the NSW State Government.

5. The NSW State Government's \$3.50 per capita contribution to the NSW public library sector is the smallest contribution made by any Australian state or territory government to a public library sector.

In late 2009, the Public Libraries NSW Metropolitan Association www.plmns.org.au hosted the largest public libraries' conference and exhibition held in Sydney for many years - **SWITCH: Public Libraries in a Changing Environment**.

SWITCH provided an ideal forum for over 300 conference delegates from across Australia's local government and public library sectors to consider **the current and future roles of public libraries in their communities' economic, social, cultural and environmental sustainability**.

The 152 NSW Local Government Areas were widely represented by their Library Managers, Library Staff, Councillors and Council Executives.

Over 60 representatives from 40 local, national and multinational library sector vendors interacted with and exhibited their products and services to delegates.

Michael Pascoe (Economics and Finance Commentator), **Hugh Mackay** (Author and Social Researcher), **Frank Panucci** (Australia Council for the Arts) and **Professor Tony Masters** (University of Sydney) each contributed valuable insights and facts relevant to the four sustainability themes.

Together with **seventeen conference speakers** from the Australian local government and public library sectors, the State Library of New South Wales, library industry vendors, and from the American Public Library Association, and with interactive, facilitated discussion between these speakers and the conference delegates, the following **key messages** were identified from **SWITCH 2009 - the NSW Public Libraries Conference & Exhibition**.

Key Messages

1. Economic Sustainability

Public libraries: Engaged in a dynamic, changing environment in which their partnerships with all levels of government and business are integral to their local communities' economic and social development.

Michael Pascoe presented an optimistic future for the Australian economy, acknowledging the impact of the recent global financial crisis.

Speakers commented on the changing landscape in which local government and public libraries are operating, which is initiating new service delivery models. Partnerships with all levels of government, with the corporate, commercial and not-for profit sectors, will be integral to these models.

Oliver Freeman of the Neville Freeman Agency, presented an overview of the strategic alternative futures project undertaken in 2009 for the NSW public library sector, titled "*Bookends Scenarios – Alternative Futures for the Public Library Network in NSW in 2030*".

John Ravlic, CEO of Local Government Managers Australia, commented that local government in the future will deliver a range of community services, and in some instances will act as a broker and partner for other organisations to deliver services that assist in achieving social inclusion and community development outcomes.

Kathleen Chau, American Public Library Association, commented on the importance of advocacy for funding, and the work of the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation in assisting US public libraries to develop and fund their public access computing capability.

Stephanie Kelly, Manager, Economic Development, City of Canada Bay, discussed the partnership between the library and local businesses, which are themselves encouraged to use the library to promote their enterprises, conduct meetings and seek business related information and advice.

2. Social Sustainability

Public libraries: A respected, collaborative partner and service provider that enhance local communities' social inclusion and education.

Hugh Mackay spoke of the changing face of Australian society and how these changes affect the way we live our lives. Regardless of the increase in online social networking, people will continue to crave the social interaction that comes with a public community and cultural space such as the local library.

George Osborne, Program Director, Hume Global Learning Village in Melbourne, with Dr Leone Wheeler from RMIT, commented that the Hume Council takes the view that both economic and social development are inextricably linked and that partnerships and innovative collaboration benefit the community.

Laurence McDonnell from the Warringah Library Service in Sydney outlined a very successful collaborative initiative between several public library services and local high schools, which has enhanced students' research capabilities and their access to a wide range of online information resources.

Tony Iezzi, Vision Australia, presented on a virtual global library service that will increase access to relevant library materials for people with print disabilities.

Suzanne Lipu of the Charles Sturt University discussed social inclusion and its link to empowered communities, increased social capital and cultural growth.

3. Cultural Sustainability

Public libraries: Operating in strategic partnerships that enrich the cultural fabric of local communities.

Frank Panucci, Australia Council for the Arts, commented on the importance of engaging communities and working with community organisations and individuals to "*co-create the future*".

Frances Sims, State Library of New South Wales, provided an update on a range of key projects and initiatives that are assisting NSW public libraries and their services to local communities.

Penny Amberg, Bega Valley Shire Council and a former Australian Government Cultural Attaché to Washington DC, provided insightful comment on Local Government, the government closest to the community, which recognises the importance of libraries to the cultural vitality of communities, and which strategically places libraries in Cultural Plans to support community cultural development.

Paula Kelly, State Library of Victoria, provided perceptive contribution on the importance of reading to babies at an early age and the consequent improvement in their literacy levels in later years.

Anne Hall of Sydney's Fairfield City Council discussed the website www.mylanguage.gov.au that provides access to search engines, web directories and news in over sixty different languages – a most valuable tool in promoting information services to diverse cultural communities.

Marvis Sofield, Library Manager from Broken Hill in NSW's far west, emphasised the social and cultural importance of public libraries to regional areas and how Broken Hill has maintained, with government financial support, a successful Writer's Group.

4. Environmental Sustainability

Public libraries: An established information network that enables all levels of government to reach local communities, and an example of sound, implemented environmental management practice.

Professor Tony Masters, University of Sydney, spoke passionately and entertainingly on climate change which has been recognised as a scientific reality for centuries. The effects of man on climate in the last 150 years, some would say, have been catastrophic. Professor Masters encouraged librarians as information specialists to continue to provide ready access to communities to factual information on this important subject.

Michelle Kline, Randwick City Library Service and Joanne Smith, Lake Macquarie City Library, presented on their respective Environmental Management initiatives that involve collaborative activity between Council Departments and the library service in involving, informing and educating communities.

David Sharman, City of Sydney Library Manager, discussed the new Surry Hills Library and Community Centre in the context of the environment being a core part of the "*2030 Vision for a Sustainable Sydney*". The aim of this vision is to create a green, global and connected Sydney.

Richard Siegersma, Executive Chairman, DA Information Services, discussed the changing environment, including that in the publishing industry and the implications and opportunities for public libraries and their communities.