

WHAT IS THE FUTURE FOR THE SPECIAL MARINE LIBRARY/LIBRARIAN?

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The library at Queenscliff is a part of a network of libraries, within the Department of Primary Industries, Victoria, Australia. The network is comprised of 17 libraries, scattered across the state. Many of these libraries are staffed part-time. Most of the other libraries are agriculturally focused. The Queenscliff library is focused on marine subject matter, and we have a freshwater campus that has a small unstaffed library.

The library has many complete journal runs, and also contains many government reports pertaining to fisheries, published by the many incarnations of our department. We also have many fishery reports produced by interstate fisheries departments, and by Commonwealth departments and statutory authorities, and a variety of reports from international bodies such as the WHO.

The main clients served by the library are the 80 scientific staff. Also on site is the Victorian Marine Science Consortium, which is consortium of five Victorian universities students and academics studying for higher degrees in the marine subject area.

Our journal and report collection is used frequently by these students and by academics. Many of these resources are not available at their home university libraries, especially in regards to our collection of grey literature.

Scientific staff and students vary greatly in their abilities and knowledge of information retrieval techniques. The library also answers reference queries from the general public and requests from all over the globe.

The Institute has since its inception, in its many guises, produced many reports, that include technical report series, internal reports and a reports series. At this stage these reports are in general only available in hard copy, and there have been many requests from all over the world for these documents in PDF format.

In November 2004 we are moving to a new Institute, we have been housed in temporary accommodation for the last 20 years. The new library is slightly larger than the current library, and takes on a new title "Information Centre".

Prior to this move almost 90 percent of the collection will be moved to another location. This is part of a bigger plan the "Library Redevelopment Project." This plan was developed several years ago to ensure the future of a library service to our department. The first part of this plan was to design a "Virtual Library" on our intranet, which attempted to make a logical and user-friendly interface combining all the functions of a library. This plan also complimented the Victorian government's plan to put government departments online. This was launched successfully, and most staff seem to have no problem finding material and making requests for items held in other libraries within the department.

The next stage of this plan was to relocate almost all collections into one central repository in a purpose-built facility. The department has invested many millions of dollars into designing and building this centre. It will be the responsibility of library staff to cull collections, in consultation with institute staff, to make a "tools of the trade" collection. This collection will be comprised of books that are needed on a frequent basis and books/journals that are needed for diagnostic reasons.

This process has thus far proved to be difficult, as staff tended to think that all books should be retained. Many staff are also frustrated because they believe that the collection was developed to suit their needs especially, and that it is not relevant to other staff in the department. There is quite a bit of validity to their claim that items should be readily available and accessible. Many of the staff enjoy research by serendipity.

However, the Knowledge Resource Centre has been built. It is situated approximately 45 minutes from the Central Business Unit of Melbourne. It is approximately 75 minutes from Queenscliff. It does have reading rooms, but the collection is closed access. The Knowledge Resource Centre has been purpose built, it is environmentally controlled, it is secure, it has space efficient ware house shelving, guaranteed staffing levels, and offers equitable service delivery to all staff, irrespective of geographic location.

Many of the tasks that have been done in the institute libraries will be centralised, for example document delivery, journal accessioning and processing, cataloguing.

The drivers for change for this development include the following

- Opportunities presented by technology and online service delivery to make a virtual library, irrespective of geographic location.
- Elimination of inefficiencies and inequities resulting from the current model of library services.
- The need to improve information and library access to all departmental staff
- The need to better utilise the capabilities of professional library staff
- Reduce problems arising from inappropriate storage
- Rising costs and budget constraints of service delivery

The KRC has been furnished with six kilometres of warehouse shelving and stretches over two levels. It will be comprised of numerous collections. Each institute library will

be housed as a unique collection. As items are requested for use, and returned, they will then become a managed sequence. There will be one journal collection in alphabetical order to the end of 2000. There will be a growing journal collection for journals received from January 2001.

This has been a big change to get your head around. The library has written many articles for departmental newsletters explaining to staff the changes that will take place. Many newsletters have been produced solely about this project. It has involved quite a number of committees and much consultation and discussion. The plan has been on the agenda for library staff for over three years. There has been passionate debate about the merits and disadvantages of the plan. Without this plan, the future of libraries within our department looked uncertain.

As specialist librarians we have had to adapt, we are no longer called librarians, and we are now known as Knowledge Resource Managers. Our job descriptions are undergoing review and change, and much of the administrative work has been removed or is in the process of being done by the centralised facility. Interestingly there has been no talk of a more professional salary. Many of the institute library staff feel a little on the apprehensive side. We face the challenge of a new role, and feel a little on the naked side without our collections.

In our new role, we will have to become more proactive in understanding what our scientists are researching, and how best we can help them obtain the most relevant information. Many scientists express the sentiment of drowning in information, and want good advice about receiving and organising the most relevant material. This supports the need for us to be proficient and knowledgeable in the best products and make sure we have excellent search skills. Our current awareness services have to be targeted effectively, so that as much material will be off site, we have to know when material has been published. The whole project has to be communicated and sold to our stakeholders. More importantly, we have to increase our skills in communicating, so that staff are aware of our new role and obtain the benefits. For some librarians the communication role is quite uncomfortable, as many in the profession have been comfortable with the stereotype of quiet meek librarians. To a certain extent there is a task to be achieved, to show that we are powerful and necessary without our collections. Already many library users have asked what we will be doing without our collections, a few have even suggested that we will become "virtual librarians."

The project has given Library Services a new status, the project scope has permeated through out the entire department. Other organisations are beginning to think along similar lines, and time will tell how well we achieved the goals of the project.

No one else in our 17 libraries specialises in Aquatic Librarianship, so I believe I have a future in this organisation. I can use this knowledge to enhance and tailor products for staff involved in aquatic research.

I like to think that the following quote tells the story nicely: "Our librarians' most valuable goal may well be to prevent scientists from becoming the road kill on the information superhighway!"

Further information on this project is available from:

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