



Item 13D.4

Public Libraries
New South Wales -
Country

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Dear Colleague,

I am writing to you as the elected leader of a member council within Public Libraries NSW. The purpose of this letter is to alert you to the current funding situation for public libraries within the state, and to seek your continued support in attempts to improve the situation.

Since I wrote to you or your predecessor in 2010, public library funding from NSW Government sources has continued to diminish, to the point where it is expected that if no action is taken in the 2013 Budget, there will be no general Library Development Grants made available in coming years. Indeed, within two years, if no change is made to the current dysfunctional funding formula, population growth will begin to cannibalise recurrent subsidy funds as well.

Last October, I wrote to your council outlining the cooperative approach between Public Libraries NSW, NSW Metropolitan Public Libraries Association and the State Library of NSW in submitting a compelling evidence-based submission, endorsed by the Library Council of NSW, to government for consideration. This letter was supported a broad summary, titled *Reforming Public Library Funding*, which was released for circulation to NSW public library network stakeholders across the state. I attach a copy of the submission for your information.

Later in the year, I circulated to your council a draft notice of motion on library funding, with the request that it be submitted and if supported directed to the Minister via your local member. With a couple of exceptions every member council of this Association is represented by a Government member, so this is an opportune time for such a campaign. I attach a further copy of the draft for your information.

We are at a crucial point in the Budget process. It is evident that the Minister's office is receiving significant lobbying efforts. If your council has not already passed the motion in support of the funding reform proposal, I would urge it to do so in the near future.

This reform was also supported by the executives of the then Local Government and Shires Associations and remains the policy of the unified organisation. I urge your council to continue to lobby strongly for this reform which will provide sustainable funding for public libraries into the future, without disadvantage to any council across New South Wales.

Yours sincerely,

Chairman
Public Libraries NSW-Country

Reforming Public Library Funding

The NSW State Government currently provides \$26.5M annually to local government in support of public libraries.

The Library Act 1939 sets out that the Library Council of NSW advises the Minister for the Arts on matters of public library policy and administration, and the provision of assistance to local libraries.

In 2012 the Library Council commissioned the State Library of NSW to work with local government stakeholders on a comprehensive review of the efficacy, administration and level of State funding in support of public libraries. As a result of this review, key stakeholders NSW Metropolitan Public Libraries Association, Public Libraries NSW and the Local Government and Shires Association have unanimously agreed on a new approach to the State Government Public Library Grants and Subsidies recommended by the Library Council of NSW. This new approach is necessary to ensure that NSW councils are able to continue to maintain and develop quality library services and ancillary services for the people of NSW.

Enabling communities

In 2012 there are 374 public libraries across NSW, operated by 151 local authorities. They operate as 99 services, some standalone and some through regional library agreements.

Over the past 10 years in NSW visits to libraries have grown by 24% to almost 36 million per annum. 3.3 million people in NSW (or 46% of the NSW population) in 2010/11 are library members. Loans of books and other materials have increased to almost 50 million per annum, and Internet usage in libraries continues to grow with more than 2.7 million hours of Internet access provided by NSW public libraries in 2010/11.¹ Public libraries are thus a key resource for community well being and the delivery of government services.

The sustained growth in demand from the people of NSW demonstrates the need for library services, and has placed pressures on local governments which are endeavouring to meet the demand.

¹ State Library of NSW (2012) *Public Library Statistics 2010-11*

A DRAFT NOTICE OF MOTION FOR COUNCILS ON THE ISSUE OF LIBRARY FUNDING

NOTICE OF MOTION: That Council write to the Minister for the Arts, the Hon George Souris MP, through Mr/Ms AB, Member for XYZ, calling upon the Government to implement the submission of the Library Council of NSW for the reform of the funding system for NSW public libraries.

RATIONALE

The funding system for public libraries in NSW is broken beyond repair, and within two years will become unsustainable, as grant funds either expire or are completely depleted by the necessity to meet recurrent funding needs due to population growth.

Transparent reform

The Library Council recommends a fairer, simplified and more transparent method for the distribution of funds. The following principles for a new approach are recommended:

- **Establish a base level of funding** for councils with populations below 20,000 people (*a safety net* for small councils).
- **Grant a modest increase in per capita allocations** for all councils to recognise cost movements since 1994
- **Address disadvantage transparently** through the application of appropriate disability factors
- **Phase out anomalies** in current allocations due to former council amalgamations
- **Ensure sustainability** by providing that no council receives less recurrent funding than 2012/13
- **Build and maintain infrastructure** via a substantial capital fund, entitled the *Building Library Infrastructure Program*.

A modest proposal

The Library Council recommends that recurrent public library funding to councils be modestly adjusted from the current \$26.5M to \$30M per annum from 2013/14 and indexed from the following year. This would be allocated as follows: 68% (\$20.4M in 2013/14) to councils by population with a base level of funding for councils with fewer than 20,000 residents, 17% (\$5.1M) to councils by NSW Local Government Grants Commission (LGGC) disability factors to explicitly address disadvantage and 15% (\$4.5M) applied to Statewide Programs.

Capital Needs

In addition, a *Building Library Infrastructure Program* of \$30M per annum for building and maintaining infrastructure is recommended to replace the now defunct provision of grants from operating funds. This program will enable councils to renew library buildings, systems, collections and equipment in regional, urban and growth areas. It is proposed that this be phased in, rising to \$30M over the 4 years from 2013/14 and indexed thereafter.