

2006

Update on the Australian National Licensing proposal: Online information resources for all Australians

Katie Wilson
Southern Cross University

Publication details

Post-print of: Wilson, K 2006, 'Update on the Australian National Licensing proposal: Online information resources for all Australians', *Online Currents*, vol. 21, no. 1, pp. 5-7.

ePublications@SCU is an electronic repository administered by Southern Cross University Library. Its goal is to capture and preserve the intellectual output of Southern Cross University authors and researchers, and to increase visibility and impact through open access to researchers around the world. For further information please contact epubs@scu.edu.au.

Electronic Resources Australia: update on the Australian National Licensing Proposal

The Australian National Licensing Proposal (NLP) grew out of a recommendation from a 2003 Senate Inquiry into the Role of Libraries in the Online Environment to establish national licensing of selected online information resources. After the Federal Government declined to provide any additional funding to support the recommendation in 2004, the National Library of Australia (charged by the senate inquiry to develop a proposal) has forged ahead with the establishment using its existing resources.

The first steps were to establish a community base representing the Australian library environment. In 2005 the National Licensing Reference Group was established at the 2nd National Licensing Forum to shepherd the development of the Australian National Licensing Proposal. The Reference Group is made up of representatives from library consortia and associations. The current convenor is Julie Rae from the Gulliver consortium in Victoria.

The group established four sub committees to examine Products, Pricing, Governance and Communications.

Governance framework

A proposed governance framework for the NLP consortium is a Membership Forum and Executive Committee to provide direction and guidance for the consortium. The Forum is made up of representatives from state, federal and regional level library groups or associations. Membership is to be on an annual calendar basis. An Executive Committee made up of six members (no more than two from the same library sector) is elected every two years and members can serve only two terms. This committee includes an Executive Officer appointed initially by the National Library. The Membership Forum and Executive Committee will set up working parties as needed.

To establish the Consortium an interim Executive Committee will be appointed by representatives of the National Licensing Reference Group and the National Library. This committee will operate for six months to establish the Membership Council, oversee administrative operations and the election of the first Executive Committee.

Six major library sectors: academic, public, school, TAFE, special and CASL (Council of Australian State Libraries) have been identified.

Products

In late 2005, the National Licensing Proposal Reference Group surveyed all Australian library sectors to assess the nationwide interest in electronic products. Of 766 responses received, the highest numbers were from the sectors least covered by existing consortia arrangements – school, special and public libraries. These are also sectors with the largest numbers of libraries. 187 respondents stated that they do not subscribe to electronic resources at present. More than 700 libraries that responded were interested in pursuing licensing under a national

proposal. Those that did not express interest were mostly school libraries that lack important infrastructure needed for an online information resource service such as technical support, reliable power sources and working computers.

Based on the product preferences expressed in the survey the NLP Reference Group proposed a selection of products in three areas: general reference, news and business information, and health information.

See the full Product Survey report at
<http://www.nla.gov.au/nlp/2005ProductSurvey.html>

Pricing

Four pricing models were proposed and reviewed by the National Licensing Reference Group. Model Three was the model selected to work with initially. In this model the NLA obtains pricing information from vendors and advises libraries who then make their choices. NLA refers the choices on to vendors who then deal directly with libraries. Licenses are then agreed and payments made between vendors and libraries or library sectors. The model allows for the incorporation of more than core products; and offers a flexible pricing model. It will require active participation from all libraries. The NLP Reference Group also recommended that Model One be the long term aim, although it is not clear when and how that will be achieved since it is dependent on additional funding.

Model One is similar to the New Zealand EPIC arrangement, where the NLA would pay vendors for licenses and recover costs from libraries. It would provide a core set of resources and centralized billing. Model Two, the Deed Agreement, required the NLA to pay vendors and recover costs from peak bodies or consortia who in turn recover costs from their members. This model would also result in the absorption of the CASL (Council of Australian State Libraries) consortium. In addition not all existing bodies and consortia may have the legal approval to sign for or act on behalf of their members.

Model Four would have incorporated the consortium into Libraries Australia, where the NLA pays vendors and recovers costs from the member libraries. This model would disadvantage libraries who were not members of Libraries Australia. Other disadvantages would be the requirement for electronic resources to be enabled for z39.50, and that the arrangement would be seen to be controlled completely by the National Library.

Models One, Two and Four were both seen to carry a high financial risk for the NLA with no additional funding from the Federal Government for the licensing proposal and no budget allocation in 2006-2007.

Library acquisitions budgets will be the basis for pricing and all library sectors provided their annual budgets. Models for breaking up and assessing costs may vary within each sector, e.g. population served for public libraries, equivalent full time student units (EFTSU) for universities.

At the National Licensing Reference Group meeting on 3 July, 2006 model three was presented to vendors attending (details of vendors not provided).

For more detail see <http://www.nla.gov.au/nlp/pricing.html>

Communication

The Communications subgroup reported ERA: **Electronic Resources Australia** as the preferred name for the program but at the July 3 meeting of the National Licensing Reference Group this was not fully endorsed. Another preferred name was SHEILA: Subscriptions held electronically in libraries, Australia. The meeting voted to keep Australian National Licensing Proposal as the current working title.

Another challenge is how to communicate the project to managers, funding bodies, the wider library community and the general public. An appropriate name is vital here. SHEILA would not convey the right message.

Next developments

A Request for Tender (RFT) for Australian library access to electronic resources was issued on 11 August 2006 with responses due on 13 September 2006. Tender evaluation will take place during September. The tender evaluation panel is made up of representatives from major library bodies. An announcement of the successful tender and soft launch is planned to take place at the ALIA CLICK06 conference on 22 September. A full launch will happen in the first half of 2007.

For more detail see <http://www.nla.gov.au/nlp/index.html>

There is almost full support within the Australian library community for a national licensing proposal, and little doubt that extended availability of online information will benefit the country's population. Collectively negotiating and purchasing electronic resources will provide greater bargaining power. Unfortunately the Federal government does not see this as a federal responsibility: *capital funding and other support for State and territory libraries is normally the responsibility of the relevant State and Territory or local governments*¹. With no additional funding the National Library has taken on establishment costs, as well as representatives from participating state/territory bodies and other national consortia. It will be a rare and wonderful opportunity for national, state/territory, regional and specialised libraries to develop a fully co-operative and shared program that will be offered to all Australians.

¹ Australian Government Response to the Senate Committee Inquiry
http://www.dcita.gov.au/__data/assets/pdf_file/10697/Australian_Government_response_to_the_Senate_Committee_Inquiry_into_Libraries_in_the_Online_Environment.pdf