

To the Chair and distinguished delegates, we thank you for accrediting the Australian Library and Information Association, ALIA, to observe this session of SCCR. As this is the first time we have addressed the room, we would like to congratulate the Chair on your appointment and express our confidence in your guidance of these deliberations.

I would like to thank Africa, India and Ecuador for their proposals on this matter and support the suggestions for a consensus text/common joint proposal. I would also like to support the statements of EIFL, and CILIP, Karisma and the SCA.

The Australian Library and Information Association, ALIA is the professional body for the library and information sector in Australia. For 77 years we have been representing individuals and institutions in all types libraries, from the National Library, through to public, academic, state, specialist, school and government libraries. Australia is a developed nation, wealthy by world standards, but geographically isolated and facing challenges of distance and nature. Australian libraries are proud of the role they have played ameliorating the tyranny of distance, providing knowledge and culture to our far-flung population.

It’s a long way from Australia to this room in WIPO. But Australian libraries do not exist just in our small corner of the world. We have known for a long time that Australian libraries face challenges, especially in cross-border projects, so in preparation for this SCCR, we surveyed a cross-section of our libraries to get some hard evidence of the scale of the problem.

Despite the statement from my learned friend from the IPA, in Australia our experience is that document supply is not going down, and I would indeed be curious as to where he is getting his figures from. Of the 15 libraries and two consortia surveyed, every single library participated in cross-border collaborations. Every single library participated in document supply/interlibrary loan, and in just those 15 libraries they dealt with 77 countries, requesting and supplying content.

Unfortunately, a majority of those libraries surveyed had also had requests from overseas institutions refused for copyright reasons, even though those requests were made in accordance with Australian copyright law, and even though for some requests the material was not available from any other source. As a legacy of our colonial heritage, many documents relating to Australia, our governance and heritage reside overseas, especially in the UK. To this day even our National Library has been unable to digitise or get access to digitised copies of some microfilm of official documents relating to Australia and the Pacific that are in archives and offices in the UK.

In the last two days that I have been here, I have heard some states question why we would need a treaty for libraries and archives, as there is nothing to stop nations implementing exceptions at the national level.

And yet, the same could be said for every WIPO copyright treaty. There was nothing, pre-Berne convention,that prevented nation states from recognising copyright, or setting it for a period of 50 years after death. But WIPO recognised the practical issues at stake and the importance of international norms.

Similarly then, the importance of protection for libraries and archives, and the importance of international norms, need to be recognised. Our experience in Australia, a developed country with specific library and archive exceptions, is that today libraries face real problems in delivering their mandated services. We look to you all to ensure that access to knowledge and dissemination of culture are protected and ask for your support for the treaty for libraries and archives.