

A FAIR Go for Libraries

By Sue McKerracher

Libraries and fairness are a natural fit. Fairness underpins librarians' professional ethos and it's this value which sets them apart from other organisations which occupy a similar space. People can buy books from bookshops, they can search for answers through Google, they can meet in a wifi-enabled cafe, but none of these providers of content, information, space and technology comes with the same brand of equity or fairness.

So FAIR was a natural progression when we were seeking a way to bring together the Australian Library and Information's (ALIA) advocacy initiatives. It worked well as an acronym and as a sentiment which encapsulated ALIA's objectives.

FAIR stands for **Freedom of Access to Information and Resources**. FAIR and its supporters are campaigning for a fair, open and democratic society where information belongs to everyone. The campaign is led by ALIA and was started because we wanted to harness the passion of people who love libraries, people who work in the library and information sector and people who believe in freedom of access to information. Once we had the title, the rest quickly followed.

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FAIR aims to increase the reach and profile of our advocacy for the library and information sector and, as we haven't branded it heavily ALIA, it provides an opportunity to partner with other associations to build a stronger national voice.

FAIR

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We want to engage library users on a particular campaign and use this engagement to create a longer-term relationship so they're there when we need them to help champion other causes. Public library users, for example, are likely to be parents or grandparents of the students who use school libraries. If they are activists for community libraries, there's no reason why they wouldn't come out in support of school libraries too.

FAIR and its supporters are campaigning for a fair, open and democratic society where information belongs to everyone.

There are more than 10 million library users in Australia supported by 27,000 people working in the library and information sector. FAIR enables people to show their support for the issues they feel passionate about. FAIR is campaigning on a number of issues which affect

Australia's library and information sector and there are so many issues to choose from. For example we will be looking at supporting well-funded libraries, school library staffing, public library budgets, copyright reform and support for government libraries. We will also provide information about the challenges to TAFE library funding, the importance of health information, family literacy, changes to higher education – all the things that put Freedom of Access to Information and Resources (FAIR) at risk.

Examples of some of the campaigns which we have run so far are fund raising for the school libraries of Vanuatu destroyed after the Cyclone hit the archipelago in March and Cooking for Copyright.

Law reform campaign example - Cooking for copyright

FAIR is campaigning for copyright law reform – it's long overdue. Copyright law in Australia is a muddle. The Australian Libraries Copyright Committee (ALCC), of which ALIA is a founder member, has lobbied long and hard for change, but the challenge has proved either too great or too low a priority for successive governments. The task of untangling the copyright regime currently lies with the Attorney-General, Senator George Brandis, who has yet to provide a satisfactory response to the findings of the Australian Law Reform Commission report of February 2014 into Copyright and the Digital Economy. Following the apparent reluctance to overhaul copyright law, the ALCC decided to introduce another approach – tackling non-controversial issues that could be easily fixed, while continuing to have the broader conversation with politicians and bureaucrats. One of these issues is the perpetual copyright in unpublished works.

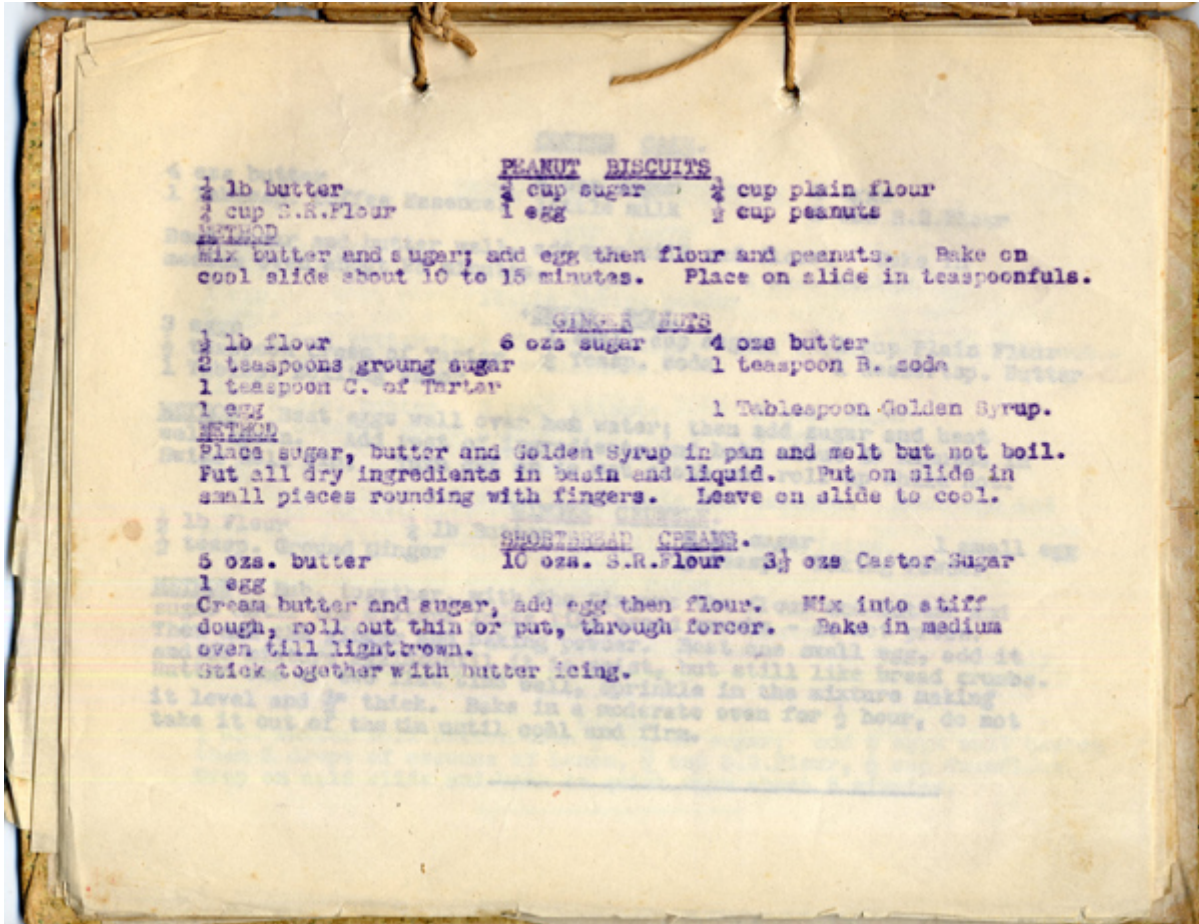
ALIA activated FAIR supporters and launched Cooking for Copyright to raise awareness of the issue. The campaign provided an opportunity for active engagement from our members and generated media coverage.



The National Library of Australia is a good example of the issue. It has approximately two million unpublished works in its collection, including letters from Jane Austen, Prince Albert, Captain Cook, Charles Darwin, Sir Charles Kingsford Smith, Dame Nellie Melba, Henry Lawson, Elizabeth Macquarie, Christabel Pankhurst and Banjo Paterson. Yet none of these can lawfully be digitised and shared with Australians on the web because of

our archaic copyright system. Unlike Canada, the US, UK and all of the EU countries, which have copyright terms for unpublished works that are in line with those for published works (70 years after the death of the creator), in Australia copyright for unpublished works lasts forever.

And it's not just the National Library; it affects every library, museum, archive and historical society with items from before the 1950s. For example, the Australian War Memorial has diaries, letters and sketches from soldiers who died in World War I. Often publication on the web is the only way to make these family records available to descendants. The State Library of South Australia's collection includes the records of the Holden motor company, including correspondence and engineering design drawings from 1853. These national treasures are trapped in vaults by Australia's outdated copyright laws.



FAIR would like the same copyright terms for unpublished works as for published works. Then our libraries, museums and historical societies could put these treasures on the web for family historians, researchers and everyone else who is fascinated by our social history.

Cooking for Copyright received incredible support from National and State Libraries Australasia, archive, museum and historical society colleagues, who provided dozens of recipes, ranging from perfect morning tea fodder through to weird medicinal products. We posted more than 20 handwritten recipes to the FAIR website – effectively contravening the current copyright law – and asked Australians to cook one of these recipes on 31 July, perhaps an old favourite, and post a photo to Facebook (facebook.com/cookingforcopyright) or tweet with the #cookingforcopyright hashtag.

Within two weeks of launching we had a strong presence on social media. More than 500 people actively shared recipes, ideas, and the promise of events in libraries up and down the country. This fun approach to a serious subject not only galvanised the sector, but it also attracted the attention of the media – radio, print and online – helping to spread the word, not only about perpetual copyright in unpublished works, but also about the need for fundamental copyright reform.

Cup Cake.

3 cups flour
1 $\frac{3}{4}$ " sugar
1 " milk
1 lb butter

4 eggs
2 teaspoonfuls Col D
1 teaspoonful Soda

Mix the butter, sugar & eggs well together, add the milk into which the Soda has been well mixed, mix the Col D with the flour. then stir flour into the mixture, bake in a shallow dish for 35 minutes in a quick oven.

The campaign provided an opportunity to visit politicians to explain the problem and provide them a [report](#) which collated all the activity and media coverage. We are hoping that all this engagement will lead to law reform which will benefit Australia's cultural heritage.

How can you be involved?

There are many ways for school libraries to be involved in FAIR. The [FAIR website](#) is a good start to understand more about the initiative. You can subscribe to a free newsletter and think about how you can use the collateral FAIR provides on its website to spread the message to friends and colleagues. We hope you will encourage your teaching colleagues to spread the word to the wider community and that you will follow the conversation on social media. Find us on Twitter: [@joinFAIR](#) and on Facebook: [facebook.com/joinFAIR](#).

When FAIR conducts campaigns, we will ask followers to participate. When any of these resonate with you, we would welcome your active participation. The strength of our case will be increased by having a critical mass to draw on.

Why should school libraries support FAIR?

Most of the above will be a given to some readers of this article, but FAIR recognises that in some schools, students have a head start thanks to the principal's willingness to invest in a well staffed, well funded school library. In others, while parents may not realise it, their children are disadvantaged because of the lack of qualified staff and/or insufficient funds to provide adequate services. School library programs, teacher-librarians and library staff help children and young people learn how to: find reliable information; use the information effectively; think critically; make informed decisions; work productively with others; build knowledge and understanding of the world; safely navigate the internet; communicate and share their ideas and find 'great reads' to meet personal interests and abilities. School librarians encourage independence, reading for pleasure, lifelong learning skills, and they play a major part in young people's academic achievement.

In an ideal world, FAIR believes every school would have an up-to-date library, staffed by qualified library and information professionals, led by teacher-librarians. In 2012, we issued a [joint statement](#) with the Australian Education Union and Australian School Library Association, which said: ". . . marked differences between schools are incompatible with the stated commitment of governments to provide a world class quality education for every Australian child. Equitable access to an appropriately funded and well resourced school library and the services of a fully qualified teacher-librarian is the right of all students and schools".



Since we released that statement, as part of a comprehensive response to the Australian Government Inquiry into School Libraries and Teacher-librarians, the situation has worsened, not improved. The government has failed to follow through on any of the recommendations of the Inquiry, despite continued pressure from the ALIA Schools Group and school library associations, including direct appeals to [the former Prime Minister](#).

FAIR will be progressing discussions with government and heads of schools in the state and Catholic education systems (private, independent schools make a selling point of providing first class libraries staffed by library and IT professionals). In a new campaign, we plan to identify and acknowledge excellence in school libraries, highlighting schools and principals who understand the value of this resource, its connection with the curriculum and the teaching of information literacy and research skills. We will be seeking the support of parents to help achieve our goal of equal access to information and resources for all Australian school students.

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Why support libraries?

You can help FAIR spread the word when you are out and about in your community. Once you start talking about how libraries are constantly evolving, there is most often a supportive listener who may become a FAIR supporter. It's important to remind your communities that school and public libraries are transforming to meet the demands of virtual lending and ebooks, creating spaces for individual and group study, relaxation, events, meetings. Libraries are incubators of imagination, repositories of knowledge, gateways to information and offer a place to think and create.

We can see the power of books, writing and ideas to inspire when more than a quarter of a million people followed Facebook founder Mark Zuckerberg's suggestion to read *The End Of Power* by Moisés Naim. The book rocketed up the charts, it was reprinted and demand for the electronic version spiked. His book club is continuing and this reminds us of the deep, rich and interesting veins of knowledge that can be gained from reading and, of course, a library opens the door to this world.

Libraries and library teams across Australia provide so much for their communities – whether it is a hospital librarian providing the most up-to-date research for surgeons, a volunteer delivering audio books to the housebound, or a teacher-librarian providing the foundations of lifelong literacy. Libraries help people find jobs by offering a suite of free resources to help unemployed people find gainful employment. Free classes boost education, teach people how to craft a resume and computer usage allows people to look for jobs, interact online with potential employers and prepare applications.

Environmental savings are generated through continued re-use of library collections. Non-users of public libraries also gain benefits from public library services. These include the value non-users place on having the option to use public libraries in future, as well as the value of knowing that public libraries exist for others to use, both now and in future.

Sign up to FAIR's newsletter so you will get information about FAIR and its campaigns. Together we are stronger and we hope to make real gains with our FAIR advocacy.

Sue McKerracher is the Chief Executive Officer of the Australian Library and Information Association.