

STATE LIBRARY OF QUEENSLAND

RESPONSE TO BROADBAND CONNECT AND CLEVER NETWORKS DISCUSSION PAPER RELEASED IN NOVEMBER 2005

Public libraries in Queensland have a vital role to play in providing equitable access to Broadband technology for whole communities and to ensuring that the public are encouraged and trained to make effective, sustainable use of this technology.

Background

The State Library of Queensland operates as a hub to a network of 334 library service points (including 12 Indigenous Knowledge Centres), in partnership with local government and Indigenous Community Councils. Queenslanders make some 18 million visits to public libraries each year, with 1.8 million people (48%) of Queenslanders registered as members.

Despite the rapid advance in new technologies, the "digital divide" is still evident in many remote Queensland communities. Unemployed and low income people are much less likely to have Internet access at home (27%) compared to those in work (57%), and so are dependent on institutions such as public libraries for their access. The provision of high quality, low cost or free access to Internet for the general public is now an expected and key service offered by public libraries.

The UN Report on Global E Government Readiness 2005 specifically mentions libraries the importance of libraries in this regard: "One solution to promoting community access, especially in the rural areas is the establishment of Public Access Points and or telecenters. These are public places to use the Internet such as community halls, libraries and Internet cafes, where computers with Internet connections are available." "UNESCO supports developing information standards and management tools, strengthening libraries and archives, and fostering access at the community level."

Public libraries are also already known as places for community training in ICT. For example, the State Library of Queensland's BHP Billiton skills.net roadshow worked in partnership with libraries to offer on-site technology courses in Internet, email, e-democracy and how to access e-services such as banking and job searching. Training was provided to 8,538 participants in 86 regional and remote communities between 2001 and 2005. Further training will be provided in 2006 to over 800 people in remote Indigenous communities in the Cape York and Torres Strait

regions, with the support of a Networking the Nation grant. Public libraries are also sustainable locations for ICT projects as they are staffed and have appropriate training to help clients in the use of this technology.

Public libraries are in a unique position to create/build digital content which celebrates rural and remote Australia. Public libraries have the skills and infrastructure to give the community the opportunity to make their stories accessible via the web. The State Library of Queensland has already begun working in this area with its Picture Queensland Outreach and the Queensland Stories project, where content is created and made available online via the public library. These projects focus on skills development, capacity building and ensure that local content is made accessible via the Internet.

The provision of content online provides the opportunity for all Queenslanders, regardless of location, to benefit from the resources available via the State Library. These online collections include:

- Digitised images, music and video of the Queensland heritage collection
- Enhanced digitised content - a virtual book including audio reading of heritage diaries and games, puzzles and ecards to increase usage and visibility of the collection
- Commercial subscription content of online newspapers, journals, encyclopaedias
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The State Library is working with Education Queensland and the Learning Place to develop curriculum support material for the digitised collections.

Response to proposed Broadband Connect and Clever Networks Initiatives:

Key issues that State Library of Queensland would like to see addressed in the Broadband Connect and Clever Networks strategies are:

Is it better or improved? Better infrastructure: A significant number of Queensland's public libraries, located in rural and remote areas, are still incapable of offering adequate public access Internet facilities to their communities, due to lack of appropriate infrastructure. Basic telephone services are still unreliable in many of these areas. While 91% of the public libraries (opened 6 hours or more) have Internet access, most still rely on dial up services. For example, Indigenous Knowledge Centres are located in Aurukun, Injinoo, Lockhart River, New Mapoon, Pormpuraaw, Wujal Wujal, Seisia, Erub, Mabuiag, Poruma, Badu and Cherbourg. Only Cherbourg and Wujal Wujal are providing

public access Internet, Wujal Wujal on an unreliable dial-up connection.

Lower cost broadband services for rural and remote areas: Public libraries are committed to offering free public access to information regardless of the format, however the cost of providing this service via Internet is prohibitive for many local Councils, particularly taking into account current usage allowances. The local public library can offer one of the few places to access Internet in remote communities and it is essential that this service is available at a reasonable cost. This provision of free Internet access ensures that issues regarding digital divide can be addressed.

The local library is also a staffed access point for reaching the full range of e-government services. This will be vital in the use of new Broadband applications (to be developed as part of Clever Networks) that deliver improved education, health and other services.

Continued training: Communities require continued training in the effective use of this technology if the full benefits are to be realised. The local library is already seen as a community information and education centre and should continue its role in this regard. Constantly changing technology requires permanent or ongoing training initiatives. Training initiatives in libraries also serve to build Broadband demand in the wider community. Demand Aggregation Brokers (DAB) could consider working through the public libraries to facilitate/support community-wide connectivity and community-wide networks.

Feedback from public librarians after a skills.net training visit:

- increased use of the Library and new members (Dysart)
- definite increase in Internet usage and I have heard of a few people actually buying computers (Emu Park)
- Increased usage, increased Internet usage, increase in membership, increased awareness of State Library services (Mackay)

Symmetrical Connections: Public libraries support the social, economic and cultural development of communities. Increasingly this work involves the creation of digital content to be used both locally and shared with a wider audience. For many remote Queensland communities this is the only way to have their story "heard" or their community recognised. Lower cost and better backhaul capacity is essential for these initiatives.

URL

State Library of Queensland - www.slq.qld.gov.au

Picture Queensland - <http://www.pictureqld.slq.qld.gov.au/>

Queensland stories - <http://www.qldstories.slq.qld.gov.au/>

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