



**National Council of
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Wahine O Aotearoa

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**Submission to the National Library of New Zealand on the consultation document:
'Public Libraries of New Zealand: a strategic framework 2005 - 2015'**

The National Council of Women of New Zealand (NCWNZ) is an umbrella organisation representing 40 nationally organised societies. It has 32 branches throughout the country attended by representatives of those societies and some 150 other societies. NCWNZ also represents a number of individual women. The Council's function is to serve women, the family and the community at local, national and international levels through research, study, discussion and action.

NCWNZ made submissions in 2002 to the Local Government Act, and the National Library of New Zealand Bill and in 2004 on the Draft Digital Strategy. In these submissions members strongly endorsed the recognition of the importance of developing and adequately resourcing access to knowledge bases and the connection between this access and the social, cultural and economic well-being of our communities.

This discussion paper was unfortunately released with a very short response time and we were unable to consult our full membership. However, it was studied by the Public Issues Standing Committee which has members with extensive work experience and expertise in the public library sector and in local government.

The background section of the discussion paper which describes the history and context of public libraries in New Zealand and their current diverse roles was an excellent summary of the present position. Any future developments must be strongly connected to this existing framework as, in general, public libraries are perceived very positively and enjoy considerable community goodwill which must not be jeopardised.

The responses to the consultation questions are italicised below.

QUESTIONS FOR CONSULTATION

1: The strategic vision

The Strategic Framework paper develops a strategic vision for the future of public libraries. It covers the key aspects of public library operations.

Do you agree with the vision outlined in the paper?

Yes the National Council of Women of New Zealand (NCWNZ) agree that the vision for public libraries of the future as outlined on page 13 reflects the broad expectations of many community sectors.



**If not, how would you modify the vision?**

Respondents have suggested that the stated vision to “provide for the creative replenishment of the human spirit” is rather presumptuous and nebulous and should be deleted from what is otherwise a valid and realistic statement.

2: The Strategic Framework’s objectives

The objectives included in the paper relate to the most important issues confronting New Zealand’s public libraries and the ones on which progress must be made if the strategic vision is to be realised.

Are the objectives the right ones to be included in the Strategic Framework and to be working on?

The objectives reflect the key challenges identified and NCWNZ commends them. The value of the public library as a “flexible space” is a very important feature and has already been demonstrated in the community libraries recently built or remodelled.

The document raises many questions in regard to funding as, for example, on page 17 in regard to charging for access to digital information. NCWNZ is concerned about the acceptance of the need for libraries to adopt a “business model” and questions the origin of this expectation for what is a publicly-funded community good organisation.

3: Future actions

An “agenda for action” that flows from the vision and the objectives will be developed and promulgated after the consultation on the Strategic Framework has been carried out.

What initiatives/actions would you like to see come out of the Strategic Framework’s objectives?

- 1) Continuing advocacy by National Library, LIANZA and public library groups to ensure that local authorities recognise the value of the public library to the community and prioritise resources to it accordingly.
- 2) Increase awareness about the current digital divide in our society, including the inadequate telecommunications coverage in many areas of the country, and the long-term social, cultural and economic implications of this. Closing this gap is of utmost importance so that members of our rural and small provincial areas are not further disadvantaged.
- 3) Addressing the recruitment and remuneration issues discussed on page 24. These challenges are urgent and reflect the pay equity problems which NCWNZ has observed in other female-biased occupations.

4: Collaboration

The Strategic Framework proposes that benefits would be derived from collaborative action between libraries themselves and libraries and other stakeholders.

Given the potential value of collaboration, both regionally and nationally and utilising the opportunities provided by the digital revolution, what are the most important collaborative initiatives to be worked on?

Public libraries have traditionally been very effective in both formal and informal collaborative action. Future priorities could cover funding to support more structured liaison between



educational institutions and public libraries, particularly schools. There is already good recognition of the need to communicate better and avoid duplication but implementation of ideas costs money. The suggestion of a pan-library initiative for “push’ technology on page 22 is specifically commended

5: New Zealand People’s Network

This concept is to enable people who don’t have ICT at home, to access the digital world via their public library. This network could provide hardware, software, brand, content access, skills training for staff, free access to the Internet and broadband.

Do you see this as strategically important to your public library and to the public library network of New Zealand? Why? Why not?

Yes, very strategically important. As discussed above the lack of equitable access to ICT is of great concern to NCWNZ. However, given the geographical distance from their nearest public library for many New Zealanders and the proven information-seeking preferences of youth, a People’s Network should focus on enabling access via a virtual or electronic library. This would require central government resourcing so that ICT pathways such as wireless and broadband access are more reliable and affordable.

6: Public Library Act

Many countries, including the United Kingdom, some Australian states, Denmark and Canada, have legislation that covers the provision of public libraries in those countries. New Zealand does not. The Local Government Act 2002 provides:

Legislation could secure the role of public libraries in New Zealand and outline the requirements expected of funders and providers. On the other hand it could impede local development and initiative.

Do you think legislation would be effective for New Zealand public libraries?

Why? Why not?

Yes, because it ensures at least minimal provisions and would also legislate for the Local Authority to “ring-fence” a proportion of its rating income for Public Library Services. This would formally recognise the importance this public facility. If the legislation was seen to be impeding local development as suggested, then the forum is available to challenge this through annual plan submissions and other strategies.

7. Culturally appropriate information

To ensure that public libraries provide services that are sensitive to the needs of individual groups in New Zealand, it will be necessary to provide access to information that is accurate, relevant, beneficial to and supportive of the people seeking the information or dependent on it.

Do public libraries do enough to meet the requirement of provide information in a culturally sensitive way?

It varies widely, as do the cultural compositions of our communities.



Do public library services appropriately reflect the needs of Māori and other cultural groups? If not, how should they be changed?

The leadership in the library profession has been very proactive in this area but public libraries differ in their responses. Research into Maori perceptions of the Auckland City Libraries resulted in the implementation of a number of innovations and organisational changes which are a model for other public libraries with a range of ethnic groups in their communities. However, consultation about appropriate services for all groups will need to be ongoing and reciprocal.

8. Building strong communities

Research indicates that public libraries have a role in contributing to the building of strong communities, through fostering identity and a sense of place.

Do you agree with this view?

Yes, strongly

How do you think that public libraries contribute to the building of strong communities? What activities should libraries be undertaking to help achieve this outcome for their local authority?

Local authorities are required to monitor their community well-being on a regular basis and the responses gained from this process give a good indication of what is working well and where there are deficits. Most public libraries in New Zealand invariably score very highly in these measures. NCWNZ considers that the public library can foster identity and a sense of place by providing an inclusive and visually appealing environment with community-sensitive opening hours and print-based and digital collections and programmes which target a proven demand. Public libraries also have a responsibility to their community to provide an informational and recreational service which is totally without bias or preferment to any other agency.

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