



1983

PARLIAMENT OF TASMANIA

PARLIAMENTARY STANDING COMMITTEE OF PUBLIC ACCOUNTS

**REPORT ON
STATE LIBRARY OF TASMANIA:
DISPOSAL OF MATERIALS**

Laid upon the Tables of both Houses of Parliament

The Committee was appointed under the provisions of section 2 of the Public Accounts Committee Act 1970 (No. 54).

MEMBERS OF THE COMMITTEE

Legislative Council

Mr Batt
Mr Gregory
Mr McKay

House of Assembly

Mr Barnard (Chairman)
Mr Davis
Mr Lyons

By Authority:

A. B. CAUDELL, Government Printer, Tasmania

REPORT

STATE LIBRARY OF TASMANIA: DISPOSAL OF MATERIALS

The Committee noted the following reference to this matter at page 169 of the Auditor-General's Report 1982:

Following audit of the 1980-81 accounts, attention was drawn to the necessity for adequate controls over the large volume of items withdrawn from circulation each year, 81 998 books, records and cassettes at an estimated face value of \$40 000 being withdrawn in that year. Authority for items to be withdrawn and the method of disposal rests with Regional and appropriate Senior Librarians and at the date of audit there was inadequate evidence of disposal action taken. This is to be rectified by suitable certification in future. The Board is understood to be seeking approval to sell discarded items.

The Committee was told by Audit that the replacement value of the books, records and cassettes disposed of was about \$750 000. The Auditor-General is concerned with proper recording of the disposal action taken and mentioned the possibility of future sales of unwanted materials. The Committee heard evidence from the State Library that of its resources made available through ninety-one outlets, some have a permanent life and value, for example most Tasmanian published material and certain reference items. In the lending for home use sections of the State Library, material has a limited life.

The average shelf-life of adult books is calculated at seven years for popular titles and nine or ten years for titles not in heavy demand. Children's books usually give from four to six years service. 'Books may be discarded for any of several reasons including excessive wear and tear, obsolescence of content, reference books superseded by new editions, and titles which no longer attract readers' interest'.

The discarding of resources is a matter which the Library claimed is not treated lightly, especially in the light of reduced budget allocations and inflationary price effects over recent years. The following table shows the number of items acquired from 1976-77 to 1981-82 and in particular the serious decline which has occurred:—

<i>Year</i>	<i>Appropriation</i>	<i>Items Purchased</i>
	\$	
1976-77	800 000	144 368
1977-78	910 000	138 507
1978-79	892 750	110 591
1979-80	1 036 250	114 024
1980-81	810 000	66 208
1981-82	910 500	63 245

In recent years the State Library has discarded 70 000 — 80 000 resources items annually of which books have comprised over ninety per cent. This large quantity of discards in the last couple of years represents those items acquired in the early 1970's. These items are deemed to have a notional residual value of \$35-\$40 000.

The figure for withdrawn items appearing in the Board's Annual Report (71 182 in 1981-82) represents both discards and items written-off. It does not include stolen books (unless written-off) nor does it include items not returned for which accounts have been raised. No separate records are kept of stolen books as it is difficult to determine the difference between stolen, lost and overdue books. The total value of items written-off in 1981-82 was \$16 895.00.

The Committee was told that the responsibility for deciding to withdraw resources from active use is a professional one exercised by Regional Librarians and appropriate Senior Librarians acting on the authority of the State Librarian. Books withdrawn from active use in one region or branch may be transferred to other regional collections for continuing use, allocated to reserve collections for occasional needs, or discarded altogether.

In recent years discarded books have been disposed of by the following methods:—

- (a) Transfer to sheltered workshops for packing as part of bulk consignments to Melbourne for pulping, income going to the sheltered workshops (94 per cent);
- (b) Transfer to Southern Teachers' Centre (with Treasury approval) for resale to teachers and interested members of the public at nominal charges. Income to Teachers' Centre to defray costs of providing the service (4 per cent);
- (c) Transfer to Library Services Branch (Education) for use in schools (2 per cent).

Late last year the State Library was informed that Australian Paper Manufacturers Ltd had discontinued the bulk consignment of pulp paper to Melbourne. In consequence method (a) above is no longer available to the Department. It is understood that the Department of Housing and Construction is now investigating alternative means of paper disposal.

The Acting State Librarian told the Committee in October 1982 that a submission was being prepared for the Minister for Education proposing that a proportion of the books withdrawn from State Library collections for discard be offered to the general public at nominal prices as a means of raising income and of recycling the small proportion of useful materials. He said 'the issue in question is whether or not revenue from the proposed resale scheme be used for the purpose of purchasing new books without prejudice to any future Appropriations for library resources'.

In other words, the Library will be seeking to have the proceeds of sales added to their appropriation. If the full residual value noted above were realised at such sales, this would only mean a potential increase in the amount available for purchases of new materials of about 4½ per cent. In the normal course of events money realised by departmental sales goes into Consolidated Revenue but in this case the Committee believes that an exception could well be made. The library would have to go to quite a deal of trouble and expense with some 80 000 items annually. It would really be performing more of a public service. In this connection, the Committee noted that it is not necessary for a book to be in poor condition before it is discarded. Obsolescence can be a factor. On the other hand, 94 per cent, of disposals in recent years were by pulping. This does suggest a degree of wastefulness. Given the aims and objects of a free library system it would have been better, surely, to have given unwanted material away.

The State Library's response to the inadequate evidence of disposal action taken commented on by the Auditor-General was that withdrawal sheets prepared by their Technical Services Section from the cards taken from the items disposed of would in future be retained. These sheets detail the author, number and allocation and were not previously retained. Certification and disposal action has been taken will also appear on the sheets. The Committee was told that audit would examine this system as it works in practice and determine its adequacy. While this is being done, the Committee recommends that the method of disposal of unwanted material be reviewed bearing that in mind increasing revenue and the need to ensure further utilisation of the materials.

Committee Room No. 3,
Parliament House, Hobart
8 September 1983

M. T. C. BARNARD, Chairman