

Submission to the Joint Committee of Public Accounts and Audit

From Professor CC Macknight

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Staff reduction in the National Library of Australia office in Jakarta

One of my other jobs today is to check whether the National Library has a copy of a book published in Indonesia some fifteen years or so ago which I want to recommend to a PhD student at ANU. I think I recall noticing that the library does hold a copy. That's one of the pleasures and privileges of living in Canberra: access to published materials from Indonesia over a long period.

What is most distressing about the proposal, as I understand it, to reduce the capacity of the Jakarta office of the NLA as a result of the imposition of the 'efficiency dividend' on the NLA is the inconstancy of policy. In particular, this would involve the removal of an Australian trained librarian to give oversight to the acquisition program. Currently we have an excellent arrangement that, despite some hesitations in the past, has delivered benefits over a long period. I had some slight association with the work of George Miller, the pioneer, almost forty years ago and have made use of the fruits of his successors' work ever since. The benefits of collection building are cumulative; the more complete various series are, the more valuable they become.

I have also been a long-term observer of Indonesian publishing in various forms and have carried back many a suitcase of material for personal use, whether bought in bookshops or distributed by government offices. The following points derive from my observations and experience:

- The quantity and quality of Indonesian book production is steadily improving, as is the importance of material published in Indonesian
- While there is considerable Indonesian use of the internet in some respects, there is, as yet or in the foreseeable future, very little electronic publication of useful Indonesian research materials
- Many publications need to be acquired shortly after publication as it's almost impossible to obtain back stock
- Obtaining material usually requires personal interaction and the mechanisms for ordering by post or other means are very poorly developed.

While locally employed staff can certainly do something in the way of acquisition, the fact remains that an Australian trained librarian is in a very much better position to select appropriate material. Both the Dutch and American acquisition offices employ foreign officers to meet their requirements. I am also aware that, over the

years, the various Australian librarians based in Jakarta have played a most useful role in the development of librarianship in Indonesia. There might be a case for seeking some AusAID money for this role.

Even if Indonesia can now, in some ways, be regarded as a 'normal country', relations between Australia and Indonesia will continue to have a special flavour by reason of the multifarious contacts across the widest possible range of interests. These contacts are certainly at a government-to-government level, but much more importantly, in my view, are found at throughout both societies; the depth and variety of contacts are much greater than most people are aware and will certainly grow. The NLA thus has a role in supporting this aspect of Australian society, as well as the needs of government and academic interests. This is not just an argument for Canberra since, as I know from previous experience in Tasmania, the NLA provides an important service across Australia. It seems a particularly poor time to downgrade an activity that has been long-term success and has great on-going importance. In this case, what looks like a small cut will mean a massive reduction in efficiency and effectiveness.

I would urge the Joint Committee to encourage the National Library to find ways to avoid implementing this particular proposal.