

Facing the future of Australian newspapers

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Abstract:

Australia's rich but relatively recent newspaper history began in the early nineteenth century with the publication of the Sydney Gazette and New South Wales Advertiser in 1803. Since the early 1990s, the National Library of Australia has collaborated with the six Australian state and territory libraries under the Australian Newspaper Plan (ANPlan) to ensure that the nation's newspapers are collected and preserved for permanent access. As technologies have evolved and the way news is produced and disseminated has undergone rapid change, the strategies which ANPlan libraries have chosen to achieve this aim have also altered. The paper will discuss the current work relating to the collecting, preservation and digitisation of newspapers by the National Library in collaboration with state and territory libraries, and the various issues encountered.

Keywords: Australian Newspaper Plan; newspapers; collecting; preservation; digitisation

Australia's newspapers are a much valued resource which tell our nation's stories with vibrant immediacy. Beginning with Australia's first newspaper, the *Sydney Gazette and New South Wales Advertiser*¹ which was published in 1803, it has been estimated that approximately 7,700 printed newspapers have been published in Australia. In defining the strategies that will assist them to collect, preserve and provide access to these newspapers into the future, Australian state, territory and national libraries have turned to collaborative approaches through the Australian Newspaper Plan (ANPlan).² Formed in the early nineties by National and State Libraries Australasia (NSLA; known then as CASL)³ it is currently being coordinated by the National Library of Australia (NLA) and consists of the NLA, each of the six state libraries and two territory libraries. The National Library of New Zealand has an observer status.

¹ *The Sydney Gazette and New South Wales Advertiser* (NSW: 1803-1842); <http://nla.gov.au/nla.news-title3>.

² Australian Newspaper Plan, National Library of Australia, www.nla.gov.au/australian-newspaper-plan.

³ National and State Libraries Australasia, www.nsla.org.au/.

ANPlan has provided a useful forum for Australian libraries to consider, together, how they will provide permanent access to Australia's newspapers into the future. Under ANPlan, each state/territory library holds primary responsibility for the newspaper material published within their state/territory, with the NLA assuming responsibility for certain national newspapers⁴ and newspapers published within the Australian Capital Territory. The ANPlan libraries report annually to NSLA against a set of Key Indicators⁵ and have a Five Year Plan (2010-2015)⁶ which is intended to provide impetus to ANPlan libraries' endeavours in those areas which are not currently well met, and to provide focus to current efforts to address certain key 'at risk' newspapers and to ANPlan libraries' outreach activities. A minor review undertaken in early 2013 included actions related to digital collecting.

Collecting

One of the main goals of ANPlan is to ensure all Australian newspapers are collected. Current print newspapers are well covered by national and state legal deposit legislations; and in some states and territories digital newspapers are also covered by legislation. However, for older printed regional newspaper titles there are gaps in holdings and even titles that are not held in any member libraries. In 2008 ANPlan libraries conducted a "search and rescue" campaign to highlight the importance of ensuring newspapers find their way into one of our libraries. The search and rescue campaign started in 2008 resulting in issues from 64⁷ titles, some of which were previously unknown to any ANPlan libraries, being found and taken into ANPlan libraries' collections. We have started discussions about renewing this campaign later this year.

The collecting of digital newspapers, however, is a different story. Technology has impacted greatly on publishing in general and on newspaper publishing in particular. The whole business model of newspaper publishing is undergoing fundamental changes, and there have been a number of research reports about the current situation.⁸ Some are quite pessimistic about how, with falling print circulation figures, falling print advertising revenue and inadequate online advertising revenue, traditional newspaper publishers can transition to the new digital publishing world. There is also competition for the attention of the online audience from online news providers, other broadcasters and even news content on Facebook or Twitter. Ironically, many of those online news providers are merely aggregators of news stories from these traditional publishers.

⁴ *The Australian, Australian Financial Review, National Times, Nation Review and Independent Monthly*

⁵ *Key indicators for measuring progress* (2013), National Library of Australia, <http://www.nla.gov.au/content/key-indicators-for-measuring-progress>.

⁶ *Five Year Plan July 2010 – June 2015*, National Library of Australia, <http://www.nla.gov.au/australian-newspaper-plan/annual-report/appendix-a>.

⁷ As of September 2012

⁸ *Life in the Clickstream II The Future of Journalism*, Media, Entertainment and Arts Alliance (2010), http://www.thefutureofjournalism.org.au/foj_report_vii.pdf, accessed 1 February 2013; *Preserving News in the Digital Environment: Mapping the Newspaper Industry in Transition : a Report from the Center for Research Libraries*, April 2011, http://www.crl.edu/sites/default/files/attachments/pages/LCreport_final.pdf, accessed 1 May 2013; *Statistical, ecosystems and competitiveness analysis of the media and content industries: the newspaper publishing industry*, Andra Leurdijk, Mijke Slot and Otilie Nieuwenhuis (2012), <http://ipts.jrc.ec.europa.eu/publications/pub.cfm?id=5380>, accessed 1 May 2013

In Australia, all major metropolitan daily newspapers that are published in print are also published on the Internet with dynamic websites. In addition, many have developed apps for tablet users, some for free and some bundled with a subscription package covering different formats. Regional and community papers are more varied. Some are still print only, while some others are online only. There are also other websites which contain news-related content.

In response to this changing publishing landscape, ANPlan libraries resolved in March this year to adopt a newspaper definition that encompasses these developments.⁹ This new definition underpins ANPlan libraries' efforts to extend their collecting activities to explore issues relating to collecting pre-press electronic versions of newspapers and archiving online newspapers. Since November 2009, the Northern Territory Library has been collecting pre-press electronic versions of a few newspapers, with a two month embargo period before issues in pdfs are put onto the Library's website.¹⁰ The National Library will also be discussing with News Limited, one of the two major newspaper publishers in Australia which publishes a few major metropolitan dailies, about providing pre-press electronic versions of all their national and state titles.

Collecting pre-press electronic versions of newspapers as a strategy for both preservation and access does pose some challenges. On the technological side, there has to be an efficient workflow and ingest system to automate the collecting process as much as possible. In addition there will have to be capabilities to manage and preserve the digital files in the long term. Negotiation with publishers will need to cover technical, workflow as well as public access issues.

As another approach to digital collecting, archiving online newspapers presents similar but also different challenges. In Australia the national web archive PANDORA (<http://pandora.nla.gov.au>) started at the NLA in 1996 with all state and territory libraries as partners. However, due to its technical complexity and the reliance on publishers to grant permission for archiving in the absence of legal deposit legislations, the archiving of online newspapers has always been on a very small scale. Since June 2009 four years of the *Sydney Morning Herald* have been archived with daily or twice daily snapshots of the top two levels of the website. The publisher has announced plans to put the content behind pay walls. The archiving work by the NLA would then face more complicated rights and technical barriers which may prevent further collecting of the online newspaper. An encouraging development is the federal government's recent announcement of their commitment to enact national legal deposit legislation to cover electronic material. Electronic legal deposit provisions will lend stronger support to our negotiation with newspaper publishers to archive their content.

While these discussions are very timely and important, ANPlan libraries understand that moving in this direction has significant implications. One is that with, even with these two activities, we are just looking at the easier end of the digital collecting spectrum. The way the newspaper publishing industry is going to develop is still very uncertain for both publishers and for collecting institutions. In addition, with new types of news content being created and published in different formats, ANPlan libraries will have to reconsider what it is that is important for heritage libraries to collect, preserve and make accessible. In the meantime, ANPlan libraries will have to keep a watching brief on industry developments. In

⁹ *What is a newspaper?* National Library of Australia (2013), <http://www.nla.gov.au/content/what-is-a-newspaper>

¹⁰ *NewspaperNT*, Northern Territory Library <http://www.territorystories.nt.gov.au/handle/10070/190886>

doing so, the representatives of each library on ANPlan will have to more closely work with their colleagues in digital library systems, digital preservation and web archiving areas. That means apart from greater collaboration at the national level through ANPlan to tackle these new challenges, there will also need to be more collaboration of staff with different areas of expertise within each library.

Preserving

The strategies that the ANPlan libraries are employing to preserve permanent access to Australia's newspaper heritage have been the subject of much consideration within ANPlan over the last decade. At the NLA, it has been acknowledged that digital preservation reformatting will replace preservation microfilming within the next few years, although the NLA is aware that this approach will raise issues around the provision of access. Nevertheless, preservation microfilming remains a key strategy for preserving permanent access to Australian newspapers and ANPlan libraries have continued to preserve their newspaper collections through filming, re-filming poorly filmed material, copying from acetate microfilm to stable polyester microfilm, computer output microfilm as well as through digitisation.

In recognition that the environmental conditions under which newspapers and newspaper microfilm are stored will strongly influence their longevity, ANPlan libraries have drawn together the factors which will need to take into account when storing newspaper material.¹¹ ANPlan libraries are generally able to store the hard copy newspapers which they hold primary responsibility for under ANPlan at environmental conditions which they consider to be optimal and, in the year 2011/12, for the first time, all ANPlan libraries reported being able to store their first generation newspaper microfilm masters under ideal conditions.¹² However, also on ANPlan's Five Year Plan is the development of Australian guidelines and standards for digitising newspapers for preservation purposes. ANPlan is committed to promoting the adoption of best practice guidelines in digital preservation and influencing the development of digital preservation standards for newspaper material.

Access and Community Engagement

All newspapers held by ANPlan libraries are catalogued onto the National Bibliographic Database, which has been managed by the NLA for over three decades and is a key piece of national information infrastructure to support collaborative work such as ANPlan's. All titles held in print, microform and digital formats in ANPlan libraries are catalogued onto the Database with holdings also indicating the location of print copies and microform masters. Titles not held by an ANPlan library but by a library which contributes to the Database are also catalogued onto the Database. ANPlan libraries regularly discuss cataloguing issues and adopt common cataloguing standards and guidelines. We have recently revised the guidelines under the new cataloguing standard, RDA.

From the users' point of view, discovering the existence and library holdings of a particular newspaper is just a stepping stone for accessing the content. Library users and researchers today also expect easy and free online access to content. In response to this, the

¹¹ *Environmental conditions for storing print and microfilmed newspapers*, National Library of Australia, March 2011, <http://www.nla.gov.au/content/environmental-conditions-for-storing-print-and-microfilmed-newspapers>.

¹² *Australian Newspaper Plan – Annual Report 2011/2012*, National Library of Australia, <http://www.nla.gov.au/australian-newspaper-plan-annual-report-2011-2012>.

National Library has assumed a national role in newspaper digitisation through the Australian Newspaper Digitisation Program which has seen nearly 400 newspapers and over 90 million articles being made freely available via the National Library's discovery service Trove.¹³ This content reflects the diversity of the Australian community and its newspaper publishing output, since newspapers from all states and territories, as well as in a few community languages, are represented.

The Australian Newspaper Digitisation Program relies on an efficient workflow with a dedicated team in the National Library managing the digitisation process with external service providers working to our standards and specifications. The content is delivered through a user friendly search interface where users can navigate easily to a selected title, issue, page or article, conduct a general keyword search as a broad search to start with, or conduct an advanced search and limit to particular parts of the text, such as article headings, or to specific types of content, such as advertisements.

Users of Trove are encouraged to add their knowledge to the digitised newspapers—through text correcting, subject tagging and comments. This has proved to be a very popular activity with over ninety million lines of text corrected to date.¹⁴ Through an online form, users of the service can also suggest newspaper titles for digitisation and can even sponsor titles. The Australian community has certainly engaged with Trove, with the NLA receiving suggestions for titles to digitise at a rate of almost two per day. ANPlan libraries play an active role in communicating with public libraries about ANPlan and particularly about the Australian Newspaper Digitisation Program.

Around fifty libraries, historical societies and other organisations and individuals have also embraced the 'contributor model' of newspaper digitisation—adding hundreds of regional newspapers to the growing corpus of digitised Australian newspapers on Trove. The NLA has developed some *Contributor Guidelines*¹⁵ which provide information on how organisations can contribute digitised newspaper content to Trove and to assist these organisations to plan their projects and prepare budget bids for this. For a standard per page cost, a title is digitised for delivery on Trove and the contributor is acknowledged on Trove. This popular initiative has greatly enhanced the sense of community ownership of the digitised newspaper content on Trove.

The Australian Newspaper Digitisation Program is a mass digitisation program using microfilm as source material. Sustainable long-term storage and digital preservation systems as well as a system architecture to support a high level of performance in searching and text corrections are critical to the Program. While using microfilmed copies of newspapers enables quick and affordable digitisation, the National Library of Australia is acutely aware of the limitations of microfilm in reproducing any original colour pages; and has encountered problems where filming was not to a high standard or where the contents of a microfilm reel had not been well documented.

¹³ Trove Digitised newspapers and more, National Library of Australia <http://trove.nla.gov.au/newspaper>).

¹⁴ *Trove stats for environment: prod, Newspaper Corrections*, National Library of Australia, <http://trove/system/stats>, (figure current at April 2013).

¹⁵ *Contributor guidelines*, National Library of Australia, (2012) <http://www.nla.gov.au/content/contributor-guidelines>.

Conclusion

While the overarching aim of ANPlan—to preserve, for permanent access, Australia’s newspaper heritage—has not altered over two decades, the strategies and activities of the group have changed considerably. In a news environment where production methodologies are ‘a continuous loop of news gathering, processing, versioning, output, response, and update,’¹⁶ ANPlan libraries’ collecting activities have extended to consider pre-press electronic versions of newspapers and archiving online newspapers. Alongside microfilming, Australian libraries are also pursuing digitisation as a long-term preservation strategy. Digitisation of Australian historical newspapers has also been a highly successful activity in opening up access to newspaper content and engaging the Australian public through facilitating innovative ways of contributing to this resource on Trove.

¹⁶ *Preserving News in the Digital Environment: Mapping the Newspaper Industry in Transition*, Center for Research Libraries, April 27, 2011, www.digitalpreservation.gov/documents/CRL_digiNews_report_110502.pdf