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Using web 2.0 in the Australian parliaments: the dream and reality

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Theme: Library and Research Services to Parliaments

Abstract:

The era of web 2.0 has heralded many changes in library services and products. While research libraries have opened up collections through flickr, interactive spaces with digital collection material, social tagging and links to library thing, parliamentary libraries have a different business environment. This paper will cover the use of web 2.0 services by Australian parliamentarians, the implementation of wikis in the Australian Parliamentary Library, experiments in Australia library space with facebook and future opportunities.

Introduction

Over the past decade Parliamentary libraries, as with libraries across all sectors, have increasingly move to use digital services and delivery of their services and products online. For Parliamentary libraries the online environment has been a boon. As the Section notes:

Parliamentary librarianship is a distinctive form of information work, mainly for Members of the Legislature, who work under great pressure, and who both use and create information. For this reason they need adequate information support. In the last twenty to thirty years there has been a great growth of this work, not just in terms of quantity, but in many legislatures in terms of quality and depth also. Research services have sprung up, and other specialist services such as economic modelling. (Library and Research Services for Parliaments Section, 2008)

The words "great pressure" indicate that area where online services have made the most difference – enabling Members of Parliament to access a wide range of information sources directly, as accessing online the services of each library. The greatest pressure facing Members is time constraints for their workload. The time pressure of providing information

analysis and advice to support Members giving speeches in the Parliament, representational activities in their electorates and working on policy has become increasingly challenging.

A recent survey of the clients of the Australian Parliamentary Library found that timeliness was the most significant issue identified in comments to questions on the library's publications, particularly Bills Digests; their preference for electronic resources suggesting that convenience is an important factor and the comments on delivery of analytic services. Respondent comments suggested that the significant motivating factor in using the Library was the need to obtain information and assistance from the Library quickly. Client need for fast and efficient delivery of reliable, high-quality information explained the comments on, and suggestions for, improvement in the timeliness and consistency of the Library's responses to client requests for information and analysis. In an environment where information and research is required for parliamentary business, such as speeches in the chambers on bills and the budget, the deadlines to enable speeches to be written are tight and have little flexibility.

The pressure is not new, and sits within a complex set of needs of Members. In a 1995 conference paper, Verrier (a former head of the Australian Parliamentary Research Service) makes this point, citing the conclusion of a member of the House of Commons that parliamentarians need:

to be able to obtain access to information they want, with the necessary level of detail, in a form which can be easily employed, within a timescale which is appropriate to its detail and moment of use, and with the full confidence that it is neutral in its presentation and accurate ... (Shepherd 1991, in Verrier 1995, 11)

A democratic role

Access to information services from Parliamentary libraries forms a cornerstone for many nations for citizens engagement with parliaments. Arguably, parliamentary libraries have a large role in a nation: 'the effective working of democracy depends on the availability of adequate information and the capacity for its independent evaluation' (Jones 1990, cited in Verrier 1995, 5). Miller et al (2004, 1) highlights the role of information, noting that, 'Information is important for the functioning of democratic legislatures', Robinson (2001, 561) focuses on the role of both information and research:

Good research and information can improve the effectiveness of the legislature along several dimensions ... First, research can improve decision making on specific policy issues faced by the legislature ... At the next level, research can help improve the institutional dynamics within the legislature ... At a political level, the use of high-quality information by the legislature can add to the perceived legitimacy of its actions in an increasingly technocratic era ... At the constitutional level, research for the legislature can position it to play a more active role in the policy process of the nation.

In Australia, this key role for parliamentary libraries in facilitating the strengthening of parliamentary democracy has been noted at the highest

political levels. Commenting on the 150th anniversary of the NSW Parliamentary Library in 1990, former Australian prime minister Gough Whitlam (1990, 21) wrote:

Australians cannot have responsible government unless their representatives have adequate parliamentary libraries. Ministers have access to all relevant information in their own departments. The men and women who sit behind and opposite them have to depend on their Library.

Today's federal parliamentarians recognise the role of the Commonwealth Parliamentary Library in supporting Australia's democracy, and have high expectations of the service they will receive. In July 2007, three members of the Joint Standing Committee on the Parliamentary Library elaborated their views in a session at the Association of Parliamentary Libraries of Australasia (APLA) conference in Canberra. Committee co-chair Liberal Senator Russell Trood (2007, 3) noted that it was 'difficult to see how life as a politician could continue without having this particular resource in [Parliament House]'. His fellow committee co-chair, the ALP member for Lyons Dick Adams (2007), was more forthright:

I believe that the contribution of the library goes beyond the walls of the parliament and to the nation itself ... we need [the Library] to give us guides, to guide us through some of the enormous amount of information which I'm sure the politicians that work in this building would tell you. We need it to teach us also the latest methods of how to retrieve that information, how to get that information together and how to get the elusive facts of course that you can whack the other side with and get above everybody else.

Parliamentary libraries in Australia have developed to support Australia's parliaments and, through their work, they help to strengthen Australia's democracy. While initially they were primarily sources of information, all have since developed research services that offer analysis and advice based on professional expertise across subject areas relevant to the parliament.¹ Today, parliamentary libraries have significant collections and increasingly offer a vast array of online resources that allow parliamentarians and their staff immediate access at their desktops to material that supports the full range of their parliamentary duties, from chamber work to electorate matters. Through their work, Australia's parliamentary libraries—like those in other democracies—also support parliamentarians in meeting the changing expectations of citizens. As Canada's Parliamentary Librarian William R. Young (2007, 34) has observed:

As citizens call for more considered parliamentary debate of public policy issues, the Library must strive to ensure that parliamentarians have access to the best possible tools to do the job. That involves offering non-partisan, balanced and relevant information that may not otherwise be accessible, or not available in the format or time-frame parliamentarians need.

Libraries contribute to Australian democracy through:

¹ For details on the establishment of research services, see Verrier (1995).

- assisting to ensure an informed parliament by providing analysis, information and advice to Members;
- contribution and in some cases management of parliamentary web sites delivering access to parliamentary information; and
- publication of information on issues of interest to the parliament through publishing research, statistical and other information products on the Internet.

Australian parliamentarians and the web

To understand the application of web, particularly web 2.0 technologies within Australian parliamentary libraries it is useful to consider the use members of parliament make of the Internet. The first federal politician in Australia to publish a home page on the world wide web was Senator Kate Lundy in 1996. She has a very strong interest in IT and the Internet and was awarded 'Most Computer Literate Politician' by the Australian Computer Society in 1996. Her web site (<http://www.katelundy.info/main/>) now provides access to media releases, information on local issues, news feeds, podcasts and a blog (katelundy.blogspot.com)

The contrast between her original site and today's demonstrates how, over 12 years, the ability to use new technology to interact with citizens has been used to enable her to extend the services available online:



Senator Kate Lundy's Web site in 2000 (courtesy of the Internet Archive)



Senator Kate Lundy's Web site in 2008

The first election campaign launch using the Internet is claimed to have occurred in 1998 with the Minister for Health and Family Services, Dr Michael Wooldridge's launch of his campaign for the seat of Casey (Department of Heath and Ageing, 1998).

Such early take up did not lead to uniform adoption of the Internet as a communication channel. A recent study (Ward, Lazoli and Gibson, 2007 p 215) found:

In terms of sheer visibility, over half Australian MPs claim a presence in cyberspace. We found a slight growth between 2003 and 2005. While in 2003 we found 79 URLs for representative (out of 150), the count rose to 90 in 2005. However, a number of URLs – around 10%– led to invalid sites of different types: sites that did not exist, sites under construction and official ministerial sites. When one considers valid sites only, 47% of federal MPs had a site at the end of 2003, rising to 54% at the beginning of 2005.

While overall email was extensively used by Members of Parliament they found (p 220):

There is little to suggest that MPs are seeking to use new ICTs to create new interactive dialogues or relationships with voters. Nor is there much to suggest that representatives see ICTs as having any wider role in reshaping parliamentary democracy. Currently, innovators and innovations are scarce in the Australian parliamentary environment. Indeed, it would appear that few MPs have much of an internet strategy. At best, the web and email fulfil an administrative modernisation function where ICTs are primarily about the representation of MPs to voters rather than vice-versa. This underlines our earlier point that the existence of technology by itself does not necessarily change the motive for, or interest in, increasing democratic engagement.

The 2007 federal election marked a turning point in using the Internet. In August the federal Liberal Party launched advertisements on YouTube, featuring Prime Minister John Howard, closely followed by the launch of the federal Australian Labour Party's campaign through the website www.Kevin07.com.au. The Australian Labour Party's campaign included extensive use of YouTube and facebook. Mr Rudd's was the first to exceed the facebook friend limit of 5,000.

The 2007 campaign was notable for:

- its use of the Internet for campaigning that was purpose written for this media;
- the extent of coverage. Bajkowski noted that "Howard's YouTube posts also closely followed a scramble by 21 sitting and aspirant federal politicians to boost their profiles by starting official candidate pages on MySpace";
- a focus on engaging with generation X and generation Y (Martin, 2007); and
- use of the Internet for a range of activities replacing face-to-face and print, for example fund raising, awareness raising, communication of specific issues, advocacy and linking to communities.

Tanya Plibersek, federal member for Sydney and opposition spokeswoman on human services, housing, women and youth, noted:

One major benefit is that it gives her access to voters that live in high-security apartment blocks.
"People don't appreciate door-to-door [campaigning]," Plibersek says. "I do street stalls and MySpace is like a street stall where people know where you are. We're trialling video messages to see if anyone listens to them."
(Bajkowski, 2007 p. 61)

If this is the environment of our clients, one of slow movement to use these new technologies, there are some significant areas where Australian parliamentary libraries need to carefully think out the opportunities provided by web 2.0 technology.

Using web2.0 inside a parliamentary library

Despite this slightly gloomy picture of engagement with clients using web 2.0 technology. The Australian Parliamentary Library has used wiki technology for collaboration by library staff to create a work support system and also to develop a publication. The description of this wiki is drawn from Hutchinson, 2007.

Communication within the Database Section, particularly the indexing team, has been a perennial challenge. The team comprises 12 permanent staff and 5 contract staff working a variety of shifts Monday to Saturday inclusive. We use an in house thesaurus and given the complexity of the materials we index, and the thesaurus (approximately 350 newspaper clippings and many journal articles are indexed each day) the team needs to hold *daily* meetings under the direction of the Thesaurus manager to discuss both new topics and those that keep coming up. A representative

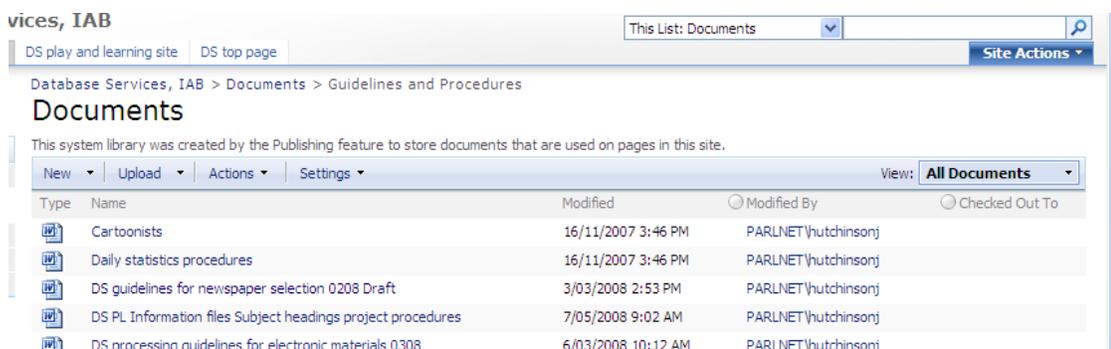
for the cataloguing team (a separate section) also attends the daily meeting. It is not always possible for all staff to attend and topics also surface during the day that need to be communicated to staff in the team.

To keep everybody up to date, the Thesaurus manager *emails* all indexers and cataloguers with directions on suitable subject headings to use for issues and topics discussed at each daily meeting, as well as other topics that emerge. The issues are driven by the content of the daily newspapers being indexed; selections from the newspapers are tailored to the current interests of the Parliament. They are stored as *individual Word documents* (called the Missives) and *are accessed using ISYS 8 software for retrieval*. There are currently about 850 such missives, most of which are kept permanently because the same topic may resurface, or a new facet of a topic emerges, or they frequently have relevance for new topics.

In 2007 the Director oversaw the commencement of building a wiki to store the missives. The vision is to have a database that has a top section (this week or this month's missives) and a larger archive. Both the current and archive missives are searchable (including through the title of the missive and its text content). There are links between related pages, so that the indexers can leap easily through related missives. The aim is to make this an interactive resource with the main editorial control remaining with the Thesaurus manager.

While what we have is still in test, the current system has:

- an announcement section: this contains section specific news, events, etc., this section is used especially for promoting Section training. Each announcement sets an agenda and provides links to relevant material (required reading, etc.)
- a document library
- a general wiki: Includes an FAQ page, a Jokes page, and pages that build a full picture on a topic - the structure of this type of page is designed to provide context around a set of instructions; and
- a 'missives' wiki.



The screenshot shows a web interface for a document library. At the top, there's a breadcrumb trail: "Database Services, IAB > Documents > Guidelines and Procedures". Below this is a search bar with "This List: Documents" and a "Site Actions" button. The main heading is "Documents". A note states: "This system library was created by the Publishing feature to store documents that are used on pages in this site." Below the note are navigation options: "New", "Upload", "Actions", "Settings", and a "View: All Documents" dropdown. The main content is a table with columns: "Type", "Name", "Modified", "Modified By", and "Checked Out To".

Type	Name	Modified	Modified By	Checked Out To
	Cartoonists	16/11/2007 3:46 PM	PARLNET\hutchinsonj	
	Daily statistics procedures	16/11/2007 3:46 PM	PARLNET\hutchinsonj	
	DS guidelines for newspaper selection 0208 Draft	3/03/2008 2:53 PM	PARLNET\hutchinsonj	
	DS PL Information files Subject headings project procedures	7/05/2008 9:02 AM	PARLNET\hutchinsonj	
	DS processing guidelines for electronic materials 0308	6/03/2008 10:12 AM	PARLNET\hutchinsonj	

An example of using the wiki to communicate complex information is one which contains the outcomes of the training session for selectors announced above on selecting journal articles, as well as providing a link to the guidelines.

DS play and learning site | DS top page | This Site: Database Services, IAB | Site Actions

Database Services, IAB > DS wiki pages > Selecting material for Library Databases

Selecting material for Library Databases

Edit | History | Incoming Link

Newspaper clips

Newspaper selection guidelines were revised in September 2007 and sent for comment to [IRUF](#) and to all Library staff in 2008, the February 2008 Draft is [here](#).

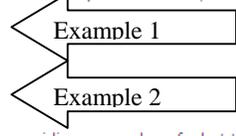
Journal articles

The latest guidelines are as at 7 February 2008 and are available [here](#).

At a meeting held 7 February Database Services senior staff led sessions on related issues, including providing examples of what to do and not to do when selecting.

1. Selection from "news journals" titles	<p>Selection from 'news journals' titles- (eg. 'Australian doctor' and 'Medical observer').</p> <p>Treat as top priority (Blue) selection .</p> <p>News journals mainly reflect the views of organisations, pressure groups and interest groups such as The Australian Medical Organisation (AMA) . They are a useful source for more detailed information on health issues, outcomes, statistics and evaluation of programs/policies.</p> <p>Selection</p> <p>1. Items of an ephemeral nature or that are very brief are generally not selected. In particular, straight newspaper reportage which may duplicate information already added to the newspaper clippings database or sourced from AAP feed should not be selected (see General guidelines for selection material for the Journal Articles database on Parinfo).</p>	Elaine
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Local intranet



The Indexing Missives have been converted to online access. Indexers can enter a search term in the dialog box at the head of the Missives section. The results can be sorted by relevance or modified date and the searcher can set up an alert service or an RSS feed to be kept informed of changes to entries using this phrase; this allows indexers to be informed as the Thesaurus editor modifies indexing instructions on a hot topic. The example below uses the search term 'child abuse'. Any of the retrieved items can be used to lead the searcher to other

This List: Missives | child abuse

Results by Relevance | View by Modified Date | Alert Me | RSS

Results 1-7 of 7. Your search took 0.08 seconds.

Database Services, IAB - Domestic violence, **child sexual abuse** in Aboriginal communities
 Domestic violence, **child sexual abuse** in Aboriginal communities.aspx ... Domestic violence, **child sexual abuse** in Aboriginal communities.aspx ... **Child sexual abuse** may also be needed for some stories even though it's a narrower term under Domest ...
[http://testsp1/dps/library/DatabaseServices/Missives/Domestic violence, child sexual abuse in Aboriginal communities.aspx](http://testsp1/dps/library/DatabaseServices/Missives/Domestic%20violence,%20child%20sexual%20abuse%20in%20Aboriginal%20communities.aspx) - 72KB - PARLNET\hutchinsonj - 16/05/2008

Database Services, IAB - **Child abuse** in Northern Territory Aboriginal communities
Child abuse in Northern Territory Aboriginal communities.aspx ... **Child abuse** + Aboriginal communities + Northern Territory will be the common terms for these stories ... We have **Child abuse** + Aboriginal communities which together will cover a lot of the various aspects ...
[http://testsp1/dps/library/DatabaseServices/Missives/Child abuse in Northern Territory Aboriginal communities.aspx](http://testsp1/dps/library/DatabaseServices/Missives/Child%20abuse%20in%20Northern%20Territory%20Aboriginal%20communities.aspx) - 72KB - PARLNET\hutchinsonj - 16/05/2008

Database Services, IAB - **Child sex abuse** in the APY Lands
Child sex abuse in the APY Lands.aspx ... revelations about **child sexual abuse** in the APY Lands came out of the inquiry chaired by Ted Mullig ... APY Lands + **Child sexual abuse** + Aboriginal communities.
[http://testsp1/dps/library/DatabaseServices/Missives/Child sex abuse in the APY Lands.aspx](http://testsp1/dps/library/DatabaseServices/Missives/Child%20sex%20abuse%20in%20the%20APY%20Lands.aspx) - 70KB - PARLNET\hutchinsonj - 16/05/2008

Database Services, IAB - Summit on Violence and **Child Abuse** in Indigenous Communities
 Summit on Violence and **Child Abuse** in Indigenous Communities.aspx ... + Violence + **Child abuse** + Summit on Violence and **Child Abuse** in Indigenous Communities (enrichment ... on Violence and **Child Abuse** in Indigenous Communities in the enrichments please (this is its offici ...
[http://testsp1/dps/library/DatabaseServices/Missives/Summit on Violence and Child Abuse in Indigenous Communities.aspx](http://testsp1/dps/library/DatabaseServices/Missives/Summit%20on%20Violence%20and%20Child%20Abuse%20in%20Indigenous%20Communities.aspx) - 72KB - PARLNET\hutchinsonj - 16/05/2008

Database Services, IAB - Permit system for access to Aboriginal land ... communities (**Child abuse** + Aboriginal communities + Northern Territory) you will also need to use A ...
[http://testsp1/dps/library/DatabaseServices/Missives/Permit system for access to Aboriginal land.aspx](http://testsp1/dps/library/DatabaseServices/Missives/Permit%20system%20for%20access%20to%20Aboriginal%20land.aspx) - 69KB - PARLNET\hutchinsonj - 16/05/2008

Database Services, IAB - Health checks, GPs and open letters
 ... to Aboriginal **child abuse** is being delivered to Mr Howard today which should mean we will have its ...
[http://testsp1/dps/library/DatabaseServices/Missives/Health checks, GPs and open letters.aspx](http://testsp1/dps/library/DatabaseServices/Missives/Health%20checks,%20GPs%20and%20open%20letters.aspx) - 70KB - PARLNET\hutchinsonj - 16/05/2008

Database Services, IAB - Multitulu problems

Local intranet

related instructions, for example 'Child sex abuse in APY Lands' has a hyperlink to [APY Lands](#).

Database Services, IAB > Missives > Child sex abuse in the APY Lands

Child sex abuse in the APY Lands

[Edit](#) | [History](#) | [Incoming Links](#)

7/5/2008

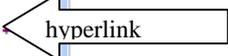
The revelations about child sexual abuse in the APY Lands came out of the inquiry chaired by Ted Mullighan into abuse of state wards in South Australia. The terms of reference were extended to allow him to investigate this area specifically.

So, after pondering how many terms we really need for this whole issue, I've decided the common terms are: [APY Lands](#) + [Child sexual abuse](#) + [Aboriginal communities](#).

You will need the term [South Australia](#) as well for any SA state government involvement because the APY Lands are also in the Northern Territory.

For the committee part use [South Australia + Committees and inquiries](#) - you don't need to keep adding this forever and a day, particularly when the stories have moved on to what is to be done about the situation.

Last modified at 16/05/2008 4:02 PM by PARLNET\hutchinsonj



In addition a wiki has been used for the collaborative development of a publication on Climate change which is based on content contributed from staff in many different sections. The nature of the subject required collaboration across many disciplines. While the publication has not yet been cleared for online delivery the authors have commented on the advantages of collaboration using a wiki rather than files in shared drives.

Parliamentary online developments

The use of digital technologies for enhanced participation in the parliamentary process is at the heart of some developments on the Australian parliament's web site. Petitions may now be done online and increasingly interaction for education activities is being explored.

Parliament of Australia: House of Representatives: Petitioning the House of Representatives - Microsoft Internet Explorer

http://www.aph.gov.au/house/whoh/petitions.htm

PARLIAMENT OF AUSTRALIA
HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Home | Senate | House of Representatives | Live Broadcasting | This Week in Parliament | Feedback | Contact

Petitioning the House of Representatives

Note: This page contains links to PDF files for more information see [Accessing files](#).

Page Menu: [An introduction to petitions](#) | [Preparing a petition](#) | [Principal Petitioner model](#) | [Other requirements](#) | [Submitting a petition](#) | [Action on petitions](#)

An introduction to Petitions

A petition is basically a request for action. The right to petition Federal Parliament has been one of the rights of citizens since federation, and it is the only way an individual can directly place grievances before the Parliament. Petitions may be received by the House on public or individual grievances provided that they relate to matters on which the House has the power to act. The House receives hundreds of petitions each year on a variety of matters.

In February 2008 the House of Representatives changed its petitioning process to make it more effective. These changes included the establishment of a [Standing Committee on Petitions](#) which has been tasked with receiving and processing petitions on behalf of the House. The Petitions Committee is able to inquire into and report on any matter relating to petitions and the petitioning system.

[top](#)

Preparing a petition

Care must be taken in the preparation of petitions as the House has certain rules about their form and content. Before preparing your petition, we encourage you to read the relevant [information](#). A [sample petition](#) will also assist you to ensure that your petition is able to be presented to the House.

Until these changed documents are uploaded to this page, people wishing to petition the House of Representatives should be aware of changed requirements, as set out below. The full requirements for petitions are set out in [Standing Orders 204-209](#). Any queries can also be directed to the [Petitions Committee](#) via contact details below.

Please note that at present petitions cannot be submitted electronically.

[top](#)

Principal petitioner model

In order to improve the ability of the House to respond to petitions, the rules for petitions now require that there is a **principal petitioner** (even where a group of people sponsor a petition). This person, who initiates, sponsors or organises a petition, must provide their full contact details on the first page of the petition. This will enable the Petitions Committee to contact him or her regarding any response or follow-up to the petition.

Contact details are for the use of the Petitions Committee and they will not be published. It is not possible for a Member of the House of Representatives to be a principal petitioner or indeed to sign a petition.

RSS feeds are available from the Parliamentary Library's and other parliamentary pages to enable interested citizens to keep up to date with publications, committees and other parliamentary developments. A major project is underway to replace the system which provides access to Parliamentary information including Hansards, other records of the Parliament, committee materials, bills and legislation and library databases. The new Parlinfo, which will be released in late August, will offer alerts and RSS feeds for a wide range of information resources.

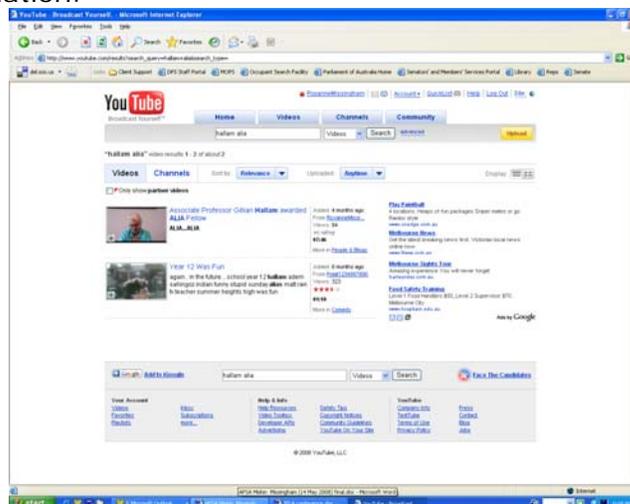
Australian libraries and library associations

Over the past year the Australian Library and Information Association (ALIA) and many Australian libraries have used web 2.0 technologies for communication to their clients, within their organisations and across the nation. Some areas ALIA has developed services through include:

- Facebook – which has provided a service linking current and potential members with a remarkable take up – over 50 members in the first day joined without any publicity.



- Youtube, which was used for an online award for Associate Professor Gillian Hallam who received a fellowship from the association.



These early steps have enabled skill development and a building of knowledge about web 2.0 applications in libraries.

Future directions

Australian parliamentary libraries are actively exploring further application of RSS feeds both directly to clients and aggregation of feeds to clients via their intranets. Tagging is being considered to supplement in-house metadata creation and a mashup with Google Maps and electorate office information is under review. At the Australian Parliamentary Library historical electorate maps have been produced using Google Maps technology and this has been well received by clients.

For Parliaments one of the most interesting challenges is to redevelop the whole parliamentary web sites to deliver more interactivity for citizens.

The Parliamentary libraries of the UK House of Commons, Parliament of Canada/Parlement du Canada, Congreso Nacional de Chile, Parliament of Australia and New Zealand Parliament are working together to fund a project of the Hansard Society *Parliament 2020: Visioning the future parliament*. The project will conduct a visioning exercise to identify how new and emergent technologies can be used to transform the processes of parliament and its relationship with the public. Consultation with stakeholders will be a key component to produce a report thematically to present a vision for a digitally enabled parliament along with practical ideas and a road map for incremental change. A pilot is planned for 2008.

This project, together with information from visioning and analytic exercise in Parliaments around the world, will provide a basis for the next generation of web sites, undoubtedly using web 2.0 and future technologies.

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