

National report
commissioned by:

**FRIENDS OF
LIBRARIES
AUSTRALIA**

OVERLOOKED UNDERFUNDED OUTSIZED SOCIAL AND ECONOMIC IMPACT

FULL REPORT 2024

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Background and Guidance
provided by FOLA

**WHY AUSTRALIA NEEDS TO
INVEST IN COUNTRY LIBRARIES.**

WE ACKNOWLEDGE THE
TRADITIONAL
CUSTODIANS OF
COUNTRY THROUGHOUT
AUSTRALIA AND THEIR
CONNECTIONS TO LAND,
SEA, AND COMMUNITY.

WE PAY OUR RESPECTS
TO THEIR ELDERS PAST
AND PRESENT AND
EXTEND THAT RESPECT
TO ALL ABORIGINAL AND
TORRES STRAIT
ISLANDER PEOPLES.



CONTENTS

KEY FINDINGS FOR DECISION MAKERS	5
EXECUTIVE SUMMARY	6
1. Why do public libraries matter?	12
2. What counts as a “country library”?	13
3. The Current State of Australia’s Country Public Libraries	14
4. Country libraries up close: Snapshots from across NSW, Victoria and Queensland	19
5. The impact of COVID pandemic on country councils and libraries	23
6. Levelling the playing field: Designing a fairer system for funding country libraries	24
7. CONCLUSION: BETTER COUNTRY LIBRARIES BUILD BETTER LIFE CHANCES	27
Appendix 1: Joint Use / School Community Libraries	30
Appendix 2: Additional Data and Insights Regarding Country Library Resourcing	31
Appendix 3: Queensland Public Library Service Models	36
Appendix 4: Victoria’s Public Library Service Model	37
Glossary of Acronyms, Terms and Symbols	38
References	40

THE PUBLIC LIBRARY: A LIVING FORCE FOR POPULAR EDUCATION

“Country libraries face multiple systemic disadvantages that limit their capacity to meet the educational, social and cultural needs of their communities. This report provides irrefutable evidence that properly funded, resourced and staffed country libraries are essential to leveling the playing field of educational and social outcomes in rural and remote Australia. It should be required reading for all politicians and policy makers at the federal, state and local levels.”



The Honourable
Michael Kirby AC CMG
Founding Patron, FOLA

“As a nation, we should be investing in delivering equal libraries for all Australians, especially those in rural and remote areas. Why is this necessary? Because the child or citizen accessing books and digital information at a remote library has the same right as an urban reader to use the modern resources of scholarship and news of the world. This document puts the library where it belongs, as a central gauge of equal opportunity and equal access for people in the bush.”



Thomas Keneally, AO
FOLA Patron

“The public library is a product of modern democracy and a practical demonstration of democracy’s faith in universal education as a life-long process.”

[UNESCO Public Library Manifesto, 1949](#)



Day of Democracy – 15 September 2023: ‘Australia’s public libraries have established a trusted position in local communities and are uniquely placed to support public engagement and the democratic process.... As the world contends with the rapid spread and impact of mis- and disinformation, library staff are increasingly called upon to help members of the community to both navigate the wealth of information at their disposal, and to develop critical information, digital and media literacy skills.’

[Australian Library and Information Association
and Australian Public Library Alliance](#)



KEY FINDINGS FOR DECISION MAKERS

- 1** Public libraries are essential local institutions that, when properly resourced, deliver measurable educational, social, and economic benefits to their communities. In rural Australia, public libraries are systemically and unfairly underfunded and disadvantaged relative to their larger regional and metropolitan counterparts.
- 2** The systemic under-resourcing of country public libraries is a result of the over-reliance on funding by local councils. Rural councils serving small populations frequently lack capacity to invest sufficiently in their libraries to deliver the educational, social and economic benefits that larger communities and Australia's capital cities often take for granted.
- 3** This underfunding has profound follow-on implications in terms of the diminished well being for the 4,000,000 Australians who live in these communities. Underfunded and under-resourced country public libraries are a significant factor underpinning the gap in educational outcomes between rural and urban Australia.
- 4** Properly funded, staffed, equipped, and resourced public libraries are proven to deliver improved learning, employment and skills for individuals and communities. Public libraries are also one of the most effective and economic ways to invest in community well-being.
- 5** Australia needs a "Gonski"¹ for Public Libraries. As a nation, we should commit to improving the resourcing of country libraries so they deliver improved quality of life for the 15 percent of Australians who live in rural and remote towns. Failing to commit to improved educational outcomes in country communities risks a growing economic and cultural divide, with rural Australians more likely to miss out on full participation in Australia's knowledge economy.

There is a base level investment to fund a public library with the capacity to deliver the outcomes that are essential for small rural communities that are otherwise disadvantaged due to their size and geographic isolation. The sooner we acknowledge this, the sooner the nation can get on with the work of ensuring every community, no matter how small and isolated, has access to a library that is fit for purpose, resourced and staffed to deliver on the outcomes that are essential for our nation to thrive.

¹ Two Gonski Reviews of Australia's schools concluded that low socio-economic communities should receive additional funding to make up for the systemic disadvantages they face. Though funded differently, public libraries in Australia struggle under similar socio-economic and geographic inequities.

INTRODUCTION: THE SCOPE AND SCALE OF AUSTRALIA'S PUBLIC LIBRARIES

Week in and week out, year after year, Australia's 1,700 public libraries provide essential educational and lifelong learning experiences to millions of people.

More than 13-million Australians are members of their local library, making them far more popular than any other club or sporting organisation.

Public libraries are popular for many reasons. They are welcoming, accessible to all, free of charge, staffed by skilled knowledge workers who collect and curate physical and digital collections and services that all can enjoy. In addition to their physical resources, they are also safe, comfortable spaces with free and ready access to technology, including reliable, fast internet.

However, not all public libraries are equal. For the majority of Australians who live in capital cities and the largest regional centres, the local library is likely to be well stocked with a large, diverse collection of physical and digital materials, staffed with professional, trained knowledge experts, and open extended weekday and weekend hours. **For those who live in the country, especially in communities of 20,000 or fewer residents, their public libraries are more likely to offer diminished access, collections, services and support, even though these communities need the resources the most.**

HOW DID THIS INEQUALITY BECOME SO STARK, AND WHAT CAN WE DO ABOUT IT?

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WHO PAYS FOR PUBLIC LIBRARIES?

Public libraries in all mainland states are funded overwhelmingly by local governments, with only modest and historically diminishing contributions from state governments. **Australia's historic structure of three tiers of government relies on local jurisdictions that, in sparsely populated parts of the nation, have limited capacity to raise taxes to provide services that are considered commonplace, if not essential, in more populous geographies.** The simple mathematics of a small tax-base, spread across a large geography, compounded by the costs of maintaining basic transport and other infrastructure mean that there is limited capacity to fund the local library.

Because of rural councils' limited capacity to invest in library infrastructure, the **public libraries that serve the millions of Australians who live in small, isolated communities are often housed in repurposed facilities.** They are more likely to feature smaller, older collections of materials and digital services, offer fewer programs such as story-times for children, summer reading clubs, study help for high school students, and tech training for seniors. They are also more often staffed by people who are not qualified librarians, and they are open fewer hours each day and fewer days each week.

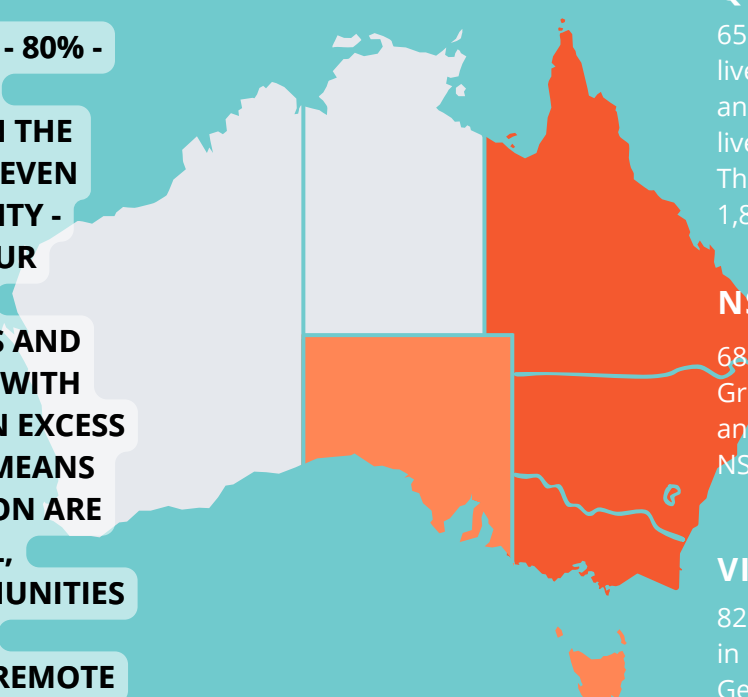
“PUBLIC LIBRARIES ARE ONE OF THE BEST INVESTMENTS AVAILABLE... DELIVERING \$4 OR MORE OF ECONOMIC ACTIVITY FOR EVERY \$1 INVESTED.”

Australia's population is highly-urbanised, with a minority living in isolated geographies

The struggles faced by rural councils and their public libraries are part of an ongoing demographic trend. The vast majority of the nation's 26.5-million residents live in the capital cities and largest regional centres on the east coast of Australia. While Melbourne, Sydney and southeast Queensland are turning into mega-cities, they and a few large regional cities are absorbing the majority of the population growth. Figure 1 below shows the extent of population concentration.



NOT ONLY IS A SUPERMAJORITY - 80% - OF AUSTRALIA'S POPULATION ON THE EAST COAST, AN EVEN GREATER MAJORITY - ~85% - LIVE IN OUR CAPITAL CITIES, REGIONAL CITIES AND OTHER CENTRES WITH POPULATIONS IN EXCESS OF 20,000. THIS MEANS NEARLY 4-MILLION ARE LIVING IN SMALL, ISOLATED COMMUNITIES ACROSS RURAL, REGIONAL AND REMOTE AUSTRALIA.



QLD 5.5 MILLION

65% of Queensland's population live in Brisbane, the Gold Coast and the Sunshine Coast, and 7% live in Townsville and Cairns. The land area of Queensland is 1,852,642 km².

NSW 8.3 MILLION

68% of NSW's population live in Greater Sydney, Wollongong and Newcastle. The land area of NSW is 801,150 km².

VIC 6.8 MILLION

82% of Victoria's population live in Greater Melbourne and Geelong. The land area of Victoria is 227,444 km².

Public libraries are proven engines of social and economic benefit



Extensive research conducted in Australia and also in North America and Europe, has confirmed that **public libraries are one of the best investments available in terms of their "return on investment", delivering upwards of \$4 or more of economic activity for every \$1 invested.** Economics are important, and they are an outcome of the educational and cultural capital public libraries build when they are well-invested and equipped to meet the learning needs of their communities. That

"when" in the previous sentence is critical. The peak body National and State Libraries Australasia (NSLA) measures public libraries on their capacity to deliver outcomes relating to literacy, digital inclusion and an informed citizenry. But only well-invested, equipped, staffed and managed libraries can deliver on these social, educational and economic outcomes we all want for every community.

DOCUMENTING THE DISADVANTAGE

This report is the first of its kind to document the systemic underinvestment and disadvantage of country public libraries relative to their larger metropolitan counterparts, featuring a meta-analysis of data from the three largest Australian states, New South Wales, Victoria and Queensland. In the same way that two “Gonski” Australian education sector reviews have galvanised a national understanding that dollars must be used to counter disadvantage, this report has been commissioned by FOLA to draw national attention to the unfairness of existing arrangements, and also to recommend several mitigation strategies.

For readers who live in the most advantaged geographies of Australia, the disadvantage of our country libraries is invisible, and yet it can and must be observed. To assist in painting this picture, we have profiled a small number of country libraries, including examples of what is possible when a community understands the benefit of a library that meets “best practice” standards. Others are examples of more typical country libraries that can be found throughout most of regional Australia.

**IN THE SAME WAY THAT TWO “GONSKI”
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AUSTRALIANS IN 2024.**

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WHAT CAN BE DONE TO LEVEL THE PLAYING FIELD?

This report identifies the scope and scale of the disadvantage libraries in country communities of fewer than 20,000 people face. It proposes tangible, achievable solutions that will have direct and measurable impacts for individuals and communities. These include:

RECOMMENDATIONS

1

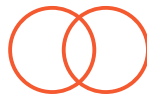
Shared Resource Strategy



Because small regional communities are “sub-scale” in terms of the populations they serve, it makes sense to join up with other libraries to overcome this disadvantage. One way to do this is via “regional library services” where a larger country community becomes the “hub” and smaller country libraries act as “spokes,” meeting community needs locally wherever possible and gaining the benefits of access to larger collections, resources and professional staff. While this strategy is used in many geographies today, it does not negate the issue of underfunding of country libraries as a whole.

2

Joint-Use Libraries



Small, rural communities may not have the resources to build, fit out and staff multiple libraries for different constituencies. The joint use library model evolved to serve as a school and/or TAFE library and a public library, often with multiple spaces and separate entrances. This model has been successfully developed primarily in South Australia, though it has recently been implemented in Young, NSW. It makes sense to investigate partnerships with Departments of Education to invest in upgraded joint use libraries that will better serve country communities.

3

“Gonski for Country Libraries”



Based on our analysis of the funding of public libraries in the three largest mainland states of Australia, it is clear that small country communities are being short-changed. “Per-capita” distribution models may look equitable on their surface, but they entrench disadvantage in a serious way. We need to consider the role states and the federal government should play to help local councils deliver better lifelong learning experiences by underwriting the cost of better public and joint use library facilities in every country town.

This is not a case of reallocating existing funding more equitably. Rather, we need to acknowledge that the outcomes public libraries deliver for their communities are often impossible under the current model.

There is a base level investment to fund a public library with the capacity to deliver the outcomes that are essential for small rural communities that are otherwise disadvantaged due to their size and geographic isolation. The sooner we acknowledge this, the sooner the nation can get on with the work of ensuring every community, no matter how small and isolated, has access to a library that is fit for purpose, resourced and staffed to deliver on the outcomes that are essential for our nation to thrive.

The time is well overdue for state and federal governments to acknowledge their role in addressing this persistent and growing crisis.

BETTER COUNTRY LIBRARIES FOR A MORE EQUITABLE COUNTRY

If we seek as a nation better and more equitable outcomes for all Australians, then we need look no further than our country public libraries. These essential local institutions have the potential to deliver far more in terms of their educational, social, cultural and economic impacts for their local communities.

EDUCATION IS THE BEDROCK OF OUR DEMOCRACY.

Public libraries have an essential role to play in maintaining healthy, thriving, engaged communities. They can also help to address the deep educational disparities that exist between small-town, rural Australia and our wealthiest cities. Country libraries are a critical part of that solution, and it is past time that they garner the nation's attention.

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1 WHY DO PUBLIC LIBRARIES MATTER?

Australia's public libraries have evolved over the last several decades to become much more than repositories of books. Today, public libraries provide a multitude of lifelong learning experiences for every demographic in the community, including baby rhyme time, homework help, senior studies support, technology classes for seniors, author talks, book clubs, local archives and research support and much more.

Well resourced public libraries are also appropriately-staffed with highly skilled, qualified and trained professional librarians and support staff. Public libraries are the only venues in every community that are open and free to everyone, cost nothing to use, provide free, high-speed internet access as well as computers - and sometimes even mobile devices to borrow for those who need them. They are the public commons for meeting, learning, and connecting.

Extensive research over many decades has proven that public libraries change lives. The peak body National and State Libraries Australasia (NSLA) now reports on six new outcome categories for Australia's public libraries, and while literacy is the first word in the list, notably it is only one part of one category:

- 1. Literacy and Lifelong Learning**
- 2. Informed and connected citizens**
- 3. Digital Inclusion**
- 4. Personal Development and Wellbeing**
- 5. Stronger and More Creative Communities**
- 6. Economic and Workforce Development**

The shift to measuring outcomes as opposed to inputs is relatively recent, and most of Australia's public and state libraries still collect and report on data regarding the latter. It is much easier to measure inputs like the number of visitors, the size of collections, and ebook downloads, for example, than evidence of personal development, stronger communities and informed citizens.

Nevertheless, we know that public libraries, along with schools, universities and TAFEs, are the four pillars of learning that underpin each of the six outcome categories above. While schools, universities and TAFEs represent different aspects and stages of formal learning,

only public libraries provide free and open access for all to the informal learning that enables people to transition through their own lifelong learning journeys. It is also obvious that underfunded, under-resourced, and understaffed country libraries will struggle to contribute in meaningful ways to the achievement of the six outcomes in their communities.

2 WHAT COUNTS AS A COUNTRY LIBRARY?

Geographically, the vast majority - about 86.5 percent - of Australians live in urbanised areas, either state and territory capital cities or a handful of other large cities, mostly along the east coast. The remainder, about 13.5 percent, live in “rural and remote” areas, which can range from larger regional centres with populations of 50-70,000 to the smallest and most isolated remote communities. There is a world of difference between a large regional centre, such as Coffs Harbor, Rockhampton, or Mildura and a small, isolated country town such as Balranald, Moura, or Ouyen.



Choosing a demarcation line to define country libraries is somewhat arbitrary. The Australian Bureau of Statistics defines “small towns” as having 10,000 or fewer residents, noting that about 10 percent of the population lives in such communities.



For the purposes of this report, we define country libraries as those in communities serving populations of fewer than 20,000 people, particularly those that are isolated from neighbouring towns and also from regional centres.

We have made this decision because the economics that underpin the funding model for most states’ public libraries makes financing libraries in communities of 20,000 or fewer residents extremely challenging.

And For the ~2.5-million Australians who live in even smaller communities of 10,000 or fewer residents, their libraries are even more substantially disadvantaged.

Diminished access to both formal and informal education is one of the most thoroughly documented disadvantages that country communities face. Most Australians living in well-populated geographies have access to multiple options for primary and high school education, as well as post-secondary vocational and university education. This is not the case in most country communities with populations below 20,000. Public libraries can deliver an incredible range of informal learning experiences to people of every age, and in country communities they are generally the only access point for such informal learning.

This report paints a picture of the diversity of country public libraries across Australia. While there are many examples of libraries delivering exceptional services and experiences to their communities, the far more common situation is to lack the resources and capacity to deliver anywhere near the level of service of their peers in larger communities. There is a simple reason for this:

Most public libraries in mainland Australia are funded through local government, and modest supplemental funding from state governments is largely allocated on a “per capita” basis.

While this approach to funding appears equitable, it progressively breaks down for smaller communities.

Rural localities face the greatest disadvantage and have the greatest need for high quality, well funded public libraries, and yet have the least capacity to provide their residents with facilities and services that people in larger communities take for granted.

“RURAL LOCALITIES FACE THE GREATEST DISADVANTAGE AND HAVE THE GREATEST NEED FOR HIGH QUALITY, WELL FUNDED PUBLIC LIBRARIES, AND YET HAVE THE LEAST CAPACITY TO PROVIDE THEIR RESIDENTS WITH FACILITIES AND SERVICES THAT PEOPLE IN LARGER COMMUNITIES TAKE FOR GRANTED.”

3 THE CURRENT STATE OF AUSTRALIA'S COUNTRY PUBLIC LIBRARIES

The standard for what constitutes a good library is one of the most important ways that we can measure the quality of the services it provides to the community, as well as tracking the inequalities between metropolitan and country libraries. Queensland and New South Wales, as well as peak body the Australian Library and Information Association (ALIA) have published standards and guidelines (Table 1) for public libraries facilities, collections, and services.

The standards and guidelines are built around the population of the community that the library serves. As population size decreases, the minimum requirements get smaller. For example, a library doesn't need to be open for as many hours, its collection doesn't need to be as extensive, there don't need to be as many - or any - professional librarians, and there don't need to be as many computers available to connect to the Internet.

TABLE 1: RECOMMENDATIONS FOR LIBRARY STANDARDS AND GUIDELINES SET BY ALIA, THE STATE LIBRARIES AND NSW AND QUEENSLAND FOR LIBRARIES IN RURAL AND METROPOLITAN AREAS

	ALIA		State Library of NSW		State Library of Qld	
	Rural	Metropolitan	Rural	Metropolitan	Rural	Metropolitan
Definition population	Under 10,000	Located in capital cities	Under 10,000	Over 100,000	Under 10,000	Over 100,000
Opening hours	30 hours per week (down to 20 hours)	64 hours per week	30 hours per week	62 hours per week	32 hours per week (down to 12 hours)	70 hours per week
Size of collection	2 physical collection item per capita	1.2 physical collection items per capita	3.6 collection items per capita (median)	1.23 collection items per capita (median)	0.85 to 1.5 physical collection items per capita	
Number of professional librarians	One qualified librarian staff member per 10,000 people		1 qualified staff member per 7,500 people	1 qualified staff member per 10,000 people	1 qualified librarian staff member per 10,000 people	
Internet access	1.2 devices per 2,500 people	0.6 devices per 2,500 people	Libraries serving <20,000 should have at least 5 PCs	1 PC per 3,000 residents	One device per 2,500 people served	

These guidelines work effectively for large metropolitan and regional geographies that have the population densities and tax bases to fund high quality library services. However, when official state and national bodies reduce the standards for small rural public libraries, they are directly impacting the kinds of services they are able to provide.

Country libraries in small towns aren't required to occupy as much space, and so there isn't nearly as much programming for small children, teenagers, and adults. With more restricted opening hours, country libraries aren't often open in the evenings or on weekends, and thus aren't as much of a resource for students completing exams or adults in the workforce.

Country libraries aren't required to have collections that are as new and regularly refreshed as metropolitan libraries. In very small communities in Queensland, the guidelines recommend library staff be at least pursuing a Certificate III in Library and Information Services. Further, volunteers are part of Queensland's guidelines for staffing of some public libraries. All these factors mean that libraries in rural geographies aren't required to provide the same standard of services as libraries in more populated areas.

And yet, high quality, well resourced and professionally staffed libraries are more important to small country towns than anywhere else in Australia. This is because of the intrinsic and systemic disadvantage small, isolated towns face in terms of access to educational resources and opportunities. While Australia's capital cities feature multitudes of museums, galleries, theatres and other public spaces, as well as incredibly well resourced state libraries, the kinds of

cultural experiences these facilities provide are largely unavailable in small isolated communities.

One way to address this disadvantage is to acknowledge that every library, no matter how small, should have a professionally trained librarian. This should happen through state or federally-funded professional librarian training in every small community. Doing so would generate a number of flow-on effects, including:

- The creation of at least one full-time professional role.
- Improved accessibility by ensuring country libraries are open for at least 40 hours a week.
- Upskilled knowledge experts who are integrated into their communities, building collections and running programs that address local needs.

In the same way that we wouldn't allow rural towns to have unqualified teachers or doctors, we shouldn't accept that rural towns are allowed (and expected) to have unqualified or under-qualified library staff.

Each state (and territory) in Australia maintains its own library service, and part of its remit is to collect data about all of the local, public libraries with its state borders. In New South Wales, for example, the Library Act of 1939 began the process of requiring each local council to maintain a public library service for local residents. Other states all followed suit, and for the last several decades they have published financial, collection, and other data about all public libraries.

Comparing a small rural council library with a large metropolitan library is another way to reveal the scope of the disadvantage faced by country communities, as well as the flaw in the "per-capita" funding model.

Balranald is a small rural community of 2,276 people on the banks of the Murray River 850 kilometres west of Sydney. Compare it with Blacktown, the largest council by population in northwestern Sydney with a population of 387,104. Balranald spends \$48.86 per capita on its library service, compared to Blacktown's \$32.46, but its total expenditure on its library service in 2022 was \$111,000, less than 1 percent of Blacktown's more than \$12.5-million. Balranald's single library is open weekdays for a total of 24 hours per week, with no evening or weekend access while Blacktown's five libraries offer extensive access beyond weekdays 9am-5pm. Finally, Blacktown's collection features nearly 285,000 items while Balranald has fewer than 15,000 items.

With this one example we can see the benefits of scale for a large metropolitan community such as Blacktown Council

and equally the disadvantage that falls to a community such as Balranald.

These standards are reflective of a different time in Australia's history when establishing public libraries in every town was the priority. It took until the mid-1990s for the last communities in Queensland to open public libraries. Thirty years on, the technological, educational and socio-economic landscape looks quite different. These standards are no longer sufficient to increase access to resources around Australia. It's time to update standards for public libraries to reflect the changing needs of communities and close the growing gap between metropolitan and rural Australians.

When the standards for country libraries are based on population size rather than on need, people in Australia's most disadvantaged communities are impacted the most.

An aerial photograph of a suburban town, likely Blacktown, showing a mix of residential houses, trees, and commercial buildings. A large, semi-transparent orange banner is overlaid on the center of the image, containing white text.

WHEN THE STANDARDS FOR COUNTRY LIBRARIES ARE BASED ON POPULATION SIZE RATHER THAN ON NEED, PEOPLE IN AUSTRALIA'S MOST DISADVANTAGED COMMUNITIES ARE IMPACTED THE MOST.

BALRANALD LIBRARY



BLACKTOWN LIBRARY



POPULATION
2,276

POPULATION
387,104

PER CAPTA SPEND ON
LIBRARY SERVICE
\$48.86

PER CAPTA SPEND ON
LIBRARY SERVICE
\$32.56

2022 EXPENDITURE
\$111,000

2022 EXPENDITURE
\$12.5 million

HOURS/WEEK
24

HOURS/WEEK
56+

COLLECTION
15,000

COLLECTION
285,000

4 COUNTRY LIBRARIES UP CLOSE: SNAPSHOTS FROM ACROSS NSW, VICTORIA AND QUEENSLAND

The best way to understand the variation in funding, facilities, and capabilities of country public libraries is to visit them. The following libraries have been selected from the hundreds FOLA's leadership has visited over the years as examples either of typical country libraries or, in some cases, as exemplars of what has been achieved when sufficient advocacy has led to a better result for a community.



Hilltops Library

Location: Young, NSW, 375 km west of Sydney

Population: 19,216

Open hours: 42.5 hours/week (6 days)

Operating budget (2022): \$118,917

Hilltops is a regional council in the Southern Tablelands of NSW. The district centre is the town of Young, which recently opened a joint-use high school and public library. This partnership between the council and the NSW Department of Education, announced in 2017, has resulted in a new, state-of-the-art facility (open as of July 2023) featuring multiple learning spaces, an Indigenous learning and knowledge centre, cafe, and a collection of 30,000 items. It is an exemplar of what is achievable with the joint-use library model.

Wentworth Shire Library

Location: Wentworth, NSW, 1,000 km west of Sydney

Population: 8,000

Open hours: 30 hours/week (5 days)

Operating budget (2022): \$84,286

Wentworth Shire is tucked into the far southwestern corner of NSW. Its 8,000 residents are spread across 10 town centres, only three of which have more than 1,000 people. Each library offers modest collections (Wentworth has just under 15,000 items across its branches) with limited opening hours. In 2020 Wentworth Shire Library received a \$500,000 Library Infrastructure Grant, which enabled the first renovation for the main library since 1995. Wentworth Shire Libraries are typical facilities in small, isolated, rural communities across much of NSW.



PHOTO: EMILY FEETHAM

Echuca Library

Location: Echuca, VIC, 225 km north of Melbourne

Population: 15,000

Open hours: 42.5 hours per week (7 days)

Echuca Library is the largest of 10 libraries in Campaspe shire, which has a total population of 38,000. Echuca sits in far north central Victoria, in the Riverina. The library has benefitted from exceptional leadership, as well as a highly active local Friends of Echuca Library group. As a result, the main facility underwent a major renovation and expansion in 2014. The library offers extensive technology access, adult literacy materials, digital and physical collections, and a range of programs. It also maintains 5 small branch libraries and 5 depots to serve the most remote locations in the shire.





Yarriambiack Library

Location: Warracknabeal, VIC, 340 km northwest of Melbourne

Population: 6,556

Open hours: 42.5 hours per week (6 days)

Yarriambiack Library is located in Warracknabeal, the district seat of a council covering a large rural area in the Wimmera/Mallee regions. The town has a population of 2,300, representing more than a third of the district population. The library service maintains 12 access points, many of which are drop-off locations and others which are co-located in medical centres, cafes and post offices.

Toowoomba City Library

Location: Toowoomba, QLD, 125 kms west of Brisbane

Population: 134,000 metro - 170,000 across the entire regional library

Open hours: 44 hours per week (6 days)

Thanks to a highly active Friends of Toowoomba Library, the city of Toowoomba invested in a brand-new facility, which opened in 2016, replacing an undersized and cramped public library. While the new, multi-story library is an example of the scale that can be achieved in a large regional city, it also acts as the hub of a regional library service that covers 12 other largely isolated country towns with some branches, such as Quinalow (75 km northwest of Toowoomba) open as little as six hours a week.



PHOTO CREDIT:
FLOATE ARCHITECTURE



PHOTO CREDIT:
RUSSON COOKE

Moura Library

Location: Banana Shire, Qld, 604 km northwest of Brisbane

Population: 1,993

Open hours: 24 hours per week (4 days)

Moura is a rural coal-mining and farming community in central Queensland. The Moura Library is a branch of the Banana Shire Library Service, which serves a population of 16,000 spread across 28,577 km². The library is very small and unrenovated, with a limited collection and limited seating. There are some small windows high up, which don't give visitors any view of the outside. The library employs a single library assistant.

THE MOURA LIBRARY SERVES 16,000, IS SMALL, UNRENOVATED, WITH A LIMITED COLLECTION, LIMITED SEATING, WITH A SINGLE LIBRARY ASSISTANT.

5 THE IMPACT OF COVID PANDEMIC ON COUNTRY COUNCILS AND LIBRARIES

As the world emerges from the COVID pandemic, it has become obvious that existing gaps between the privileged and the disadvantaged have significantly widened. This trend extends to the funding and accessibility of public libraries in country towns.

The COVID pandemic created an exponentially higher demand for reliable internet access, devices to access the internet, and technological literacy. Based on published standards, Australia's country libraries aren't required to have as many devices that access the internet, don't have as fast or reliable connections to the internet, and often serve less tech-literate communities.

Being able to access the internet is both invaluable and essential, particularly in rural geographies, as it became the only way to stay in touch with loved ones during lockdown. Now, even though life seems to have returned to normal, there are still hybrid events, including funerals, concerts, and classes, that can be streamed and attended by people all over the country.

COVID also placed enormous financial strains on local governments, particularly small, rural and remote councils where the imperatives of geography mean that road maintenance consumes a disproportionate share of their budgets. According to Cameron Morley, the head of Public Library Services at the State Library of NSW, the four years since the beginning of COVID have seen the bottom quartile of NSW libraries continuing to deteriorate in

terms of all key metrics of service delivery, while the top quartile remain on an improving trajectory (presentation at the NSWPLA state Conference, 16 November 2023).

In 2020, the Australian Bureau of Statistics stopped asking if households have access to the internet, "given increased mobile usage on personal devices outside the home". However, in 2022, there were still 11% of Australians - 2.9 million people - that are "highly excluded from digital services," meaning that reliable internet is either too expensive or they don't know how to use it. Often, it's people in Australia's most remote and rural communities that are left behind.

Funding high speed, reliable internet for a local public library is much more economical than trying to deliver affordable internet to remote homes sprinkled across rural Australia. Ensuring that each library has a qualified librarian would result in technological literacy classes and professional assistance to the information communities need. Making sure there are sufficient devices that access the internet in country libraries is the bare minimum; there needs to be supporting infrastructure to ensure that people in Australia's most rural and remote communities are able to make the most of their local public libraries.

6 LEVELLING THE PLAYING FIELD: DESIGNING A FAIRER SYSTEM FOR COUNTRY LIBRARY FUNDING

Current funding models systematically underfund country libraries relative to their metropolitan counterparts. Even when additional funding becomes available, it is often distributed in ways that look fair superficially but that fail to acknowledge deep existing inequities.

A recent example is the 'Renew Our Libraries' campaign waged by Public Libraries NSW in 2018. This campaign was launched to address the woefully inadequate state contribution to public libraries in NSW - which had declined from a near 25% contribution in the 1980s to less than 8% by the late 2010s. The campaign was well structured, managed, and effective, and it has resulted in an additional \$15-million per year on top of the ~\$30-million of pre-existing state government commitment. 

How is this funding distributed? According to State Library of NSW data, in the most recent financial year each council received a supplemental "subsidy adjustment" on top of their \$2.85 "per capita" funding. The quantum paid to each council ranged from about \$57,625 to \$68,000. **According to the State Library "approximately half of the State's 128 councils that provide library services have populations below 20,000 people. Per capita funding of \$2.85 per head alone would not provide a payment of any significance to these low-population councils."** Accordingly, the subsidy adjustment is provided at a "base level" of \$50,000 per council and with a small top-up based on ABS data of demographic disadvantage. 

It's understandable - and likely politically essential - that the state feels every council needs to receive some of the additional funding. Still, the reality is that the wealthiest councils in the state - such as Woollahra and Mosman - received \$57,625 while some of the poorest and most remote - such as Brewarrina and Coonamble - received \$68,000 each. 

Moreover, as a percentage of their total budgets, the subsidy adjustments for wealthy and large metropolitan councils are tiny.

Mosman spends about \$2.8-million on its single library, thus its subsidy adjustments provide an extra 2 percent. Woollahra spends \$6.8-million on its three branches, and thus its subsidy provides about 0.8 percent extra funding. And for the largest Sydney council, Blacktown, its subsidy payment is worth less than 0.5 percent on top of its council budget. No doubt a fairer way to distribute that funding would be to allocate most if not all of it to the most disadvantaged and underfunded country libraries.

Another way of understanding the inequity is to compare total operating expenditure on country libraries to expenditure for all public libraries - particularly in NSW, Victoria and Queensland. Table 2 summarises what we have found.

FIGURE 2: OPERATIONAL EXPENDITURE OF PUBLIC LIBRARIES SERVING POPULATIONS OF <20,000

	2021-22 Operational Expenditure for Public Libraries with < 20,000 LGA population (<25,000 in Vic)	2021-22 Operational Expenditure for all Public Libraries	% of Total Operational Expenditure for all Public Libraries: 2021-22 Operational Expenditure for Public Libraries with < LGA 20,000 population (<25,000 in Vic)
NSW	\$27.69m	\$371.61m	7.45%
QLD	\$6.34m	\$259.35m	2.45%
VIC	\$11.59m	\$213.40m	5.43%
Total	\$45.62m	\$844.36m	5.40%

As a percentage of total library expenditure, NSW spends the most, at 7.45 percent, while Victoria is at a paltry 2.45 percent. And yet, as the ABS data shows, about 15 percent of Australians live in rural communities with populations of up to 20,000.

So, it is clear from this data that country libraries are not being invested in proportion to their populations, much less in acknowledgement of the systemic disadvantages they face.

PRINCIPLES

To resolve the current and growing inequities that are putting the nation at risk of a permanent educational, economic, and cultural rift between the coastal and metropolitan “haves” and the rural and remote “have nots,” we need to start from first principles.

- 1** We need to acknowledge that the current state of public library access in country communities is, on the whole, unfair.
- 2** We need to acknowledge that recent efforts to increase funding, while worthy, have not necessarily directed that funding to the areas of greatest disadvantage.
- 3** We need to recognise that the most underserved areas have the greatest need, and thus additional investment will have the greatest impact.
- 4** Rather than minimising requirements or investment, we must establish standards for country library services that focus on capabilities, access and opportunity.
- 5** These capabilities will include standards related to facilities, collections, staffing levels, staff qualifications, opening hours, technology access, programming, etc.

THESE RESPONSIBILITIES OBVIOUSLY CANNOT DEVOLVE TO LOCAL COUNCILS BECAUSE, AS WE HAVE SEEN, AND INDEED AS THE STATE LIBRARY OF NSW'S OWN ANALYSIS HAS SHOWN, SMALL RURAL COUNCILS HAVE THE LEAST CAPACITY TO INVEST MEANINGFULLY IN THEIR LIBRARIES.

7 CONCLUSION: BETTER COUNTRY LIBRARIES BUILD BETTER LIFE CHANCES

Australia's country libraries are, on the whole, deeply disadvantaged relative to their better-funded urban and regional counterparts. Rural and remote local governments with small populations lack the capacity to invest in the facilities, staffing, collections, technology and programs that deliver the kinds of social, cultural, and educational benefits that larger, more populous communities expect.

There are three key steps that can and should be taken as a matter of priority to ensure every Australian in every community has access to a high quality, professionally staffed, well resourced library that will improve the quality of their life and that of their entire community.

1

Shared Resources



Where possible, and where geography permits, it makes sense to develop “hub and spokes” models with larger regional libraries supporting service delivery in smaller, outlying communities. This model is in operation in many parts of regional Australia already, though arguably it more often results in a well-resourced main library with underinvested branch libraries. The solution is not to redistribute funding from the hub to the spokes but rather to ensure every library has sufficient capacity on its own to meet the essential educational, social and cultural needs of its community.

2

Joint-Use Libraries



In small communities, it makes sense to build and maintain one large library rather than two or even three subscale and under-resourced ones. This model of joint use libraries has been developed extensively in South Australia, where many communities have joint school or TAFE and public libraries (see Appendix 1). In New South Wales, the Hilltops Library (featured above) is an example of a partnership between the NSW Department of Education and the local council to build a facility that would not have been achievable separately.

To-date, too little has been done to pursue joint use libraries in country Australia. The challenges of collaborating between state education bureaucracies and local governments can appear off-putting. But as Hilltops and other examples have recently shown, exceptional results are achievable when these logical strategies to pool resources are pursued.

3



“Gonski for Country Libraries”

While sharing resources and pursuing joint-use strategies can solve some challenges for country libraries, there is no avoiding the conclusion that Australia underinvests and under-delivers when it comes to the quality of library services in small country communities.

As a nation, we have exceptional expertise in librarianship and we understand what makes for a high quality, modern public library service. But we have not committed to providing access to consistent, high-quality public library services for all Australians. The significant minority of up to 15 percent of Australians who live in small communities of 20,000 people or fewer are far less likely to have access to a quality public library that research shows delivers profound individual and community social, educational and economic benefits.

Acknowledging the unfairness of the current situation will require us to also commit to meeting a best-practice standard for all country libraries, which will include:

- A modern, purpose-built facility (where none currently exists), featuring spaces for programs, activities, meetings, and study
- At least one qualified librarian
- Opening hours that include some evenings and weekend access
- Physical and digital collections that are of sufficient size, currency, and reflective of local needs.

LIBRARIES AS A READY OPPORTUNITY FOR AUSTRALIAN EDUCATION POLICY

This report represents an obvious opportunity for the Federal Government, under the leadership of the current Minister for Education, Jason Clare, who has made addressing systemic disadvantage in learning outcomes his core agenda. His recent commitment to establishing “regional university study hubs” to make higher education more accessible to students in country Australia is a sign of his commitment. The logical next step is to leverage the established model of the properly-funded and professionally-staffed public library **and ensure every Australian has ready access in their local community.**

THE HON JASON CLARE MP HAS MADE ADDRESSING SYSTEMIC DISADVANTAGE IN LEARNING OUTCOMES HIS CORE AGENDA. THE LOGICAL NEXT STEP IS TO LEVERAGE THE ESTABLISHED MODEL OF THE PROPERLY-FUNDED AND PROFESSIONALLY-STAFFED PUBLIC LIBRARY TO ENSURE EVERY AUSTRALIAN HAS ACCESS.

APPENDIX 1: JOINT USE / SCHOOL COMMUNITY LIBRARIES

The outcome of a South Australian political mandate to rapidly provide rural communities with public libraries was the commencement from 1977 of 46 school community libraries serving rural populations of up to 3,600 people.

Source: [Inquiry into Joint Use Libraries](#)



As a result, School Community Libraries (SCL) (also known as 'joint-use' libraries) were pioneered in Australia by the state of South Australia. They have proven a remarkable success in providing public library services in rural areas of South Australia.

School community libraries located in remote parts of South Australia are operated in conjunction with the Department for Education and Child Development (DECD). In 2018-19 these libraries received 1.3 million visitors, equivalent to 13% of the state's overall visitation to public libraries. This group of libraries received 15 visits per capita, due to the small population living in these remote areas, and school students also using these libraries.

Source: [SGS-Economics-and-Planning_The-value-of-public-libraries-in-South-Australia_FINAL.pdf](#) (sgsep.com.au) 2020



This model has been successful due to the effective cooperation between the Department for Education and Child Development (DECD), Local Government and the Libraries Board.

Source: [School Community Libraries](#)



APPENDIX 2: ADDITIONAL DATA AND INSIGHTS REGARDING COUNTRY LIBRARY RESOURCING

Opening Hours

The opening hours of those libraries with sufficient resources are typically around 40 hours or more per week e.g. Monday to Friday (e.g., 9:00am to 5:00pm or slightly later), Saturday morning to early afternoon (e.g., 9:00am to 12:30pm) and are mostly closed on Sundays.

Small country libraries in NSW, Victoria and Queensland may be only open for between 2 to 10 hours per week.

TABLE 3: LIBRARY OPENING HOURS

	Examples of 2021-22 Opening Hours for Public Libraries in communities with <20,000 population in NSW and Queensland and < 25,000 in Victoria
NSW	Finley (Berrigan): Wednesday and Friday 09:30am- 5:30pm; Sat: 09:30am - 12:00pm Pooncarie (Wentworth): Monday, Tuesday, Thursday, Friday: 12:00pm - 3:00pm Quambone (North Western): Monday and Thursday: 4:00pm - 5:00pm Tottenham (Lachlan; located in the Tottenham Central School): Monday, Wednesday and Friday 3:30pm - 5:30pm
VIC	Harrow (Wimmera): Friday 9.30am - 12.30pm Jeparit (Hindmarsh - birthplace of Sir Robert Menzies, former Australian Prime Minister): Monday 9:00am - 12:00pm; 1:00pm - 5:00pm; Wednesday 9:00am - 12:00pm Kaniva (Wimmera): Tuesday 3:00pm - 6:00pm; Thursday 9.30am - 1:00pm Friday 3:00pm - 6:00pm Leitchville (Gannawarra): Tuesday: 1:30pm - 5:30pm
QLD	Bloomfield (Cook): Wednesday 9:00am -12:00pm and 12.30pm - 3.30pm Saturday 9:00am - 12:00pm Hebel (Balonne): Wednesday 12:00pm - 6:00pm Mungallala (Maranoa): Tuesday 3:00pm - 5.30pm; Saturday 9:00am - 12:00pm Quinalow (Toowoomba): Tuesday 9:00am - 1:00pm and Wednesday 2:00pm - 5:00pm

Collection Size and Age

The collection size (e.g., books, e-books) is very low for small country libraries when compared with larger library services. This reflects the low levels of funding available to those libraries.

TABLE 4: COLLECTION SIZE AND AGE

	2021-22 Collection Size and Age for Public Libraries in communities with < 20,000 population in NSW and Queensland and < 25,000 in Victoria	2021-22 Collection Size and Age for Public Libraries in communities with > 20,000 population in NSW and Queensland and > 25,000 in Victoria
NSW	Collection size range Books: 8,035 to 46,616 eBooks: 431 to 36,794	Collection size range Books: 24,579 to 329,309 eBooks: 309 to 56,270
	Library materials purchased in last 5 years Average 43.8%; Range 20.2% to 83.1%	Library materials purchased in last 5 years Average 51.6%; Range 23.2% to 84.7%
	Library materials purchased in last 10 years Average 61.1%; Range 21.0% to 95.0%	Library materials purchased in last 10 years Average 74.6%; Range 42.6% to 98.0%
VIC	Collection size range and age Physical Items: 14,214 to 107,506 % purchased in last 5 years: 40.2% eBooks: 582 to 18,364 % purchased in last 5 years: 87.4%	Collection size range and age Physical Items: 31,901 to 403,331 % purchased in last 5 years: 64.5% eBooks: 4,952 to 178,006 % purchased in last 5 years: 94.2%
QLD	Collection size range and age Physical Items: 555 to 45,913 % purchased in last 5 years: not published eBooks: 0 (the majority) to 27,657 % purchased in last 5 years: not published	Collection size range and age Physical Items: 31,916 to % purchased in last 5 years: not published eBooks: 3,904 to 518,443 % purchased in last 5 years: not published

Note: Victoria's collection size for its rural libraries skews higher than in NSW and Queensland because many small country libraries (and some large, suburban libraries) are amalgamated into "regional library corporations." There are benefits to doing so, in part due to increased purchasing power associated with a larger population. A discussion of the [regional library corporation model](#) is beyond the scope of this report.



Library Staff Numbers

Small country libraries have few staff and in many cases, there is no qualified Librarian on staff. Large library services have up to 100 qualified Librarians and up to 300 FTE staff.

Queensland reports on the number of volunteers that work with libraries. Most of the libraries serving very small populations had little or no volunteer support. Where small libraries had volunteer support, the volunteer numbers ranged from 1 to 20. The majority of larger libraries had volunteer support ranging in numbers from 2 to 182.

TABLE 5: LIBRARY STAFF NUMBERS

	2021-22 Library Staff Numbers for Public Libraries in communities with < 20,000 population in NSW and Queensland and < 25,000 in Victoria	2021-22 Library Staff Numbers for Public Libraries in communities with > 20,000 population in NSW and Queensland and > 25,000 in Victoria
NSW	Total staff (FTE) range: 1 to 12.75 Full time Librarians range: 0 to 4	Total staff (FTE) range: 7.76 to 100.2 Full time Librarians range: 1 to 27
VIC	Total staff (FTE) range: 1.5 to 8.0 Full time Librarians range: Not reported	Total staff (FTE) range: 6.1 to 119.7 Full time Librarians range: Not reported
QLD	Total staff (FTE) range: 0.5 to 10.04 Full time Librarians range: 0 to 2	Total staff (FTE) range: 6 to 311.77 Full time Librarians range: 0.5 to 106.27

Library Program Sessions

Small country libraries with limited resources are able to conduct a small number of program sessions. Brisbane City Council's libraries, for example, conducted over 10,000 Library Program sessions in 2021-22.

While there are many program sessions held in libraries, the number of people attending each session can be 10 or fewer in smaller libraries. Large metropolitan libraries average 15 to 40 attendees per session.

TABLE 6: LIBRARY PROGRAM SESSIONS

	2021-22 Program Sessions held by Public Libraries in communities with < 20,000 population in NSW and Queensland and < 25,000 in Victoria	2021-22 Program Sessions Held by Public Libraries in communities with > 20,000 population in NSW and Queensland and > 25,000 in Victoria
NSW	Range from 8 to 1,349 sessions	Range from 76 to 1,846 sessions
VIC	Range from 18 to 1,027 sessions	Range from 252 to 6,765 sessions
QLD	Range from 0 to 581 sessions	Range from 85 to 10,287 sessions

Technology Items / Devices Available in Libraries for Library Users

The technologies include desktops, laptops and tablets. Queensland refers to these as public access devices, not all of which have internet access. NSW reports on internet access terminals in public libraries.

TABLE 7: TECHNOLOGIES ITEMS / DEVICE AVAILABLE IN LIBRARIES FOR LIBRARY USERS

	2021-22 technology Items / devices available in Public Libraries in communities with < 20,000 population in NSW and Queensland and < 25,000 in Victoria	2021-22 technology Items / devices available in Public Libraries in communities with > 20,000 population in NSW and Queensland and > 25,000 in Victoria	2021-22 Overall total of technology items / devices available in all Public Libraries in NSW, Queensland and Victoria
NSW	Range from 2 to 25 Total of 283 for this cohort 8.6% of the overall total	Range from 6 to 170 Total of 3,000 for this cohort 91.4% of the overall total	3,283 (internet terminals)
VIC	Range from 2 to 28 Total of 136 for this cohort 4.4% of the overall total	Range from 6 to 332 Total of 2,998 for this cohort 95.6% of the overall total	3,134
QLD	Range from 0 to 25 Total of 400 for this cohort 13.4% of the overall total	Range from 10 to 692 Total of 2,581 for this cohort 86.6% of the overall total	2,981

APPENDIX 3: QUEENSLAND PUBLIC LIBRARY SERVICE MODELS

There are three categories of governance for public library collections in Queensland: Independent Libraries, Rural Libraries Queensland and Indigenous Knowledge Centres.

- **Independent Libraries (IND)** are library services operated in councils with populations over 15,000. These library services are controlled by the local council, subject to the terms of the Service Level Agreement with the Library Board of Queensland. State Library of Queensland provides an annual Public Library Grant directly to the council to support the development of its library collection.
- **Rural Libraries Queensland (RLQ)** represents a collaboration between local governments and State Library of Queensland to provide high quality public library services to rural Queensland. Regional councils with populations under 15,000 are eligible to join RLQ. These library services are controlled by the local council, subject to the terms of the Service Level Agreement with the Library Board of Queensland. In lieu of a cash grant, local governments operating RLQ services receive a notional allocation which funds the centralised purchase of library materials and e-resources.

Rural Libraries Queensland | State Library of Queensland (slq.qld.gov.au)
Libraries – Barcaldine Regional Council (barcaldinerc.qld.gov.au)

Rural Libraries Queensland (formerly the Country Library Service) is a collaboration between the State Library of Queensland and approximately 30 of the local government councils to provide library libraries to rural communities.

Source: [State Library of Queensland](#)

- **Indigenous Knowledge Centres (IKCs)** represent a collaboration between Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander councils and State Library of Queensland to provide public library services and cultural keeping places in these communities. Councils are responsible for the physical infrastructure, staffing and day to day operations of their IKCs. State Library of Queensland contributes financial support to councils to assist with operational costs including staffing, library collections and professional development. State Library of Queensland also collaborates closely with the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander councils to provide guidance and assistance on programs, activities and events delivered through IKCs to sustain ongoing knowledge transfer.

APPENDIX 4: VICTORIA'S PUBLIC LIBRARY SERVICE MODEL

Victoria Operating Model
Home (libsvic.org.au)



Libraries Victoria provides shared services for libraries across Victoria.
About Us (libsvic.org.au)



Who We Are

Libraries Victoria is a steadily growing consortium of 31 Victorian library services who are already using the shared Integrated Library Management System (ILMS) or are in the process of implementing the system.

Membership provides libraries with a stable, secure, industry-leading management system, as well as access to a suite of related products and services including access to a group catalogue.

Libraries have the option to join the consortium which offers a choice of different service options: Contract Services; Support Services and Shared Services. The flexibility of our approach meets the varying needs of our members and provides savings to all libraries through the purchasing power of the wider group.

While Public Libraries Victoria provides the Libraries Victoria consortium administration and support services, SirsiDynix provides the technology – the ILMS. This includes the platform, the discovery interface, business intelligence analytics, and mobile Apps as part of the package.

The Libraries Victoria consortium works collaboratively through its Advisory Committees and a strong User Group. Together we are always looking for new opportunities to improve our systems and workflows to achieve efficiencies and cost savings for all consortia libraries. Ultimately, these benefits flow to our patrons as we strive to better support the services offered by our libraries.

Importantly, Libraries Victoria is supported by our system administrators who manage and maintain the ILMS for our libraries and offer local support and assistance as required. The team also provides opportunities for collaboration and learning via workshops, presentations and various system updates.



GLOSSARY OF ACRONYMS, TERMS AND SYMBOLS

Acronyms, Terms and Symbols	Description	
ABS	Australian Bureau of Statistics	
ALIA	<u>Australian Library and Information Association</u>	
APLA	<u>Australian Public Library Alliance</u>	
COVID	Coronavirus disease (COVID-19) is an infectious disease caused by the SARS-CoV-2 virus that became a pandemic in 2020.	
FOLA	<u>Friends of Libraries Australia</u>	
FTE	Full time equivalent - a measure of staff numbers	
Gonski	In 2010, the Australian Government commissioned a panel, led by David Gonski AC, to conduct the Review of Funding for Schooling. The <u>Gonski Review</u> Report (2011) identified several highly concerning trends in the educational outcomes of Australian students.	
Hilltops	Hilltops Council is a local government area in the South West Slopes region of NSW	
IKC	Indigenous Knowledge Centres represent a collaboration between Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander councils and State Library of Queensland to provide public library services and cultural keeping places in these communities.	
IND	Independent libraries in Queensland are library services operated in councils with populations over 15,000.	
JU	Joint Use	
km	Kilometre	
km ²	Square kilometre (land area measure)	
LGA	Local Government Area	
NSLA	<u>National and State Libraries Australasia (nsla.org.au)</u>	
NSW	New South Wales	
NSWPLA	<u>NSW Public Libraries Association</u>	
PC	Personal Computer	
per capita	In economics, business or statistics, per capita is used to report average figures per person	
QLD	Queensland	
RLQ	Rural Libraries Queensland represents a collaboration between local governments and the State Library of Queensland. Regional councils with populations under 15,000 are eligible to join RLQ.	
SCL	School Community Library (South Australia) - also known as a Joint Use (JU) Library	
SWITCH	<u>The annual NSW Public Libraries Association Conference</u>	
TAFE	Technical and Further Education	
Vic	Victoria	
<	The symbol for 'less than'	
>	The symbol for 'greater than'	

SCL	School Community Library (South Australia) - also known as a Joint Use (JU) Library
SWITCH	<u>The annual NSW Public Libraries Association Conference</u>
TAFE	Technical and Further Education
Vic	Victoria
<	The symbol for 'less than'
>	The symbol for 'greater than'



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15. ALIA Accredited Courses. Current librarian, teacher librarian, information specialist and library technician courses, accredited by ALIA. They include Diploma, Bachelor, Graduate Diploma and Masters education programs. <https://alia.org.au/Web/Web/Careers/ALIA-Accredited-Courses.aspx>



National report
commissioned by:

**FRIENDS OF
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AUSTRALIA**

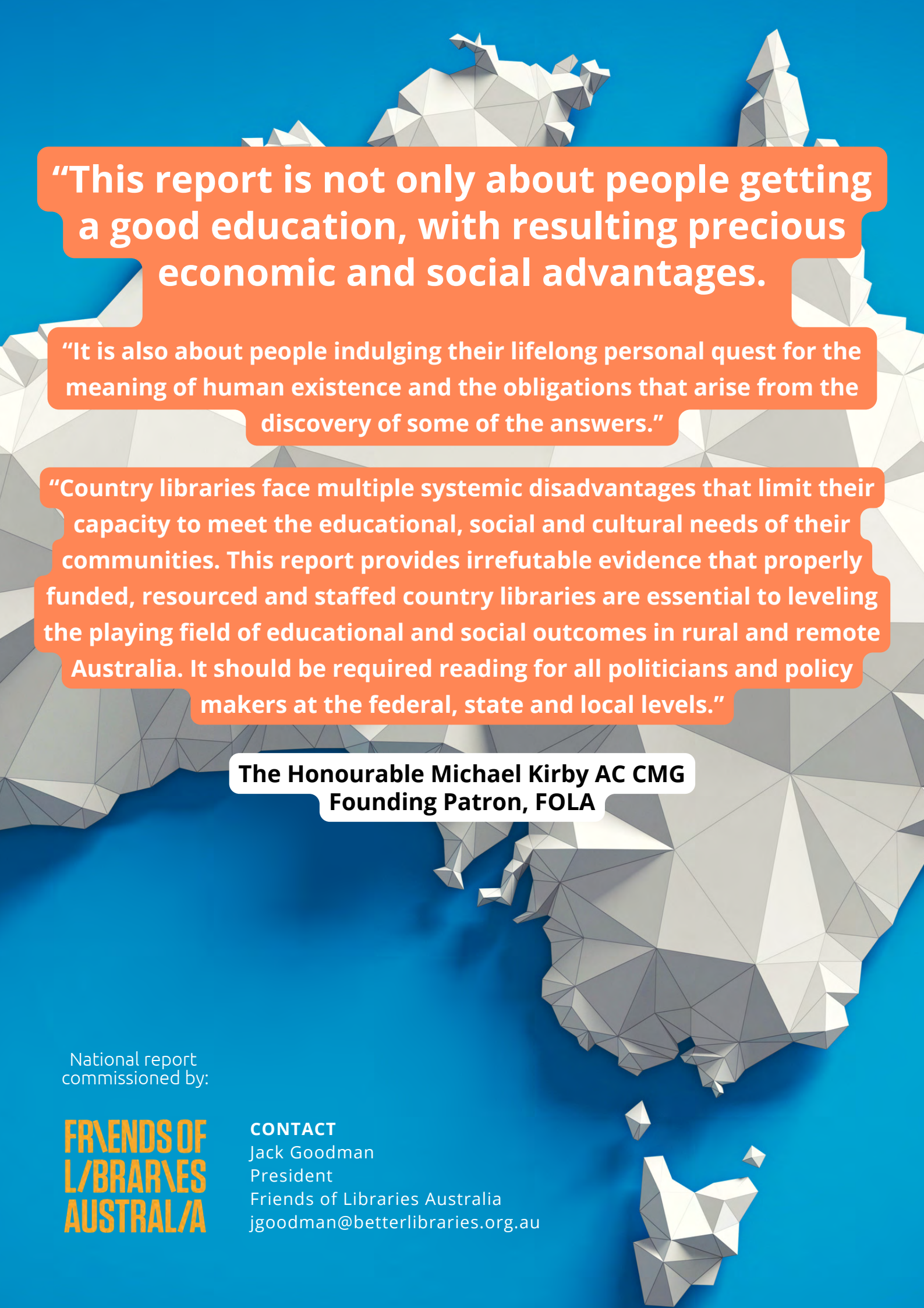
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Report created with support from:

Anna Goodman
Sarah Crossing
In-kind support from Studiosity





“This report is not only about people getting a good education, with resulting precious economic and social advantages.

“It is also about people indulging their lifelong personal quest for the meaning of human existence and the obligations that arise from the discovery of some of the answers.”

“Country libraries face multiple systemic disadvantages that limit their capacity to meet the educational, social and cultural needs of their communities. This report provides irrefutable evidence that properly funded, resourced and staffed country libraries are essential to leveling the playing field of educational and social outcomes in rural and remote Australia. It should be required reading for all politicians and policy makers at the federal, state and local levels.”

**The Honourable Michael Kirby AC CMG
Founding Patron, FOLA**

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