

**FROM NEPI TO NCLIS: A "DO-DECADE" OF DEMOCRATISATION, 1992-2004**

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### Abstract:

*In 1988 FW de Klerk, then South African Minister of Education, disbanded the National Council on Libraries and Information, NACLI, established in 1982, stating that national information policy was no longer the responsibility of government. By 1990 the end of the existing political dispensation was in sight. The National Education Consultative Committee, NECC, set up the National Education Policy Investigation project, NEPI, governed by five over-arching principles of non-sexism, non-racism, redress, democracy and a unitary system. Within NEPI a subgroup for LIS worked in 1991-1992 on future LIS structure and policy, which included revival of the concept of a national board, or council, for LIS as part of a central democratic structure and governance for LIS, within the ministry of education. This concept underwent many changes as education policy evolved. The focus for LIS matters moved, in 1995, from the arena of education policy to that of arts, culture, science and technology. The National Council for Library Services Act, No. 6 of 2001, was the culmination of a decade of debate within the LIS community and the first meeting of the NCLIS took place in March 2004.*

### Introduction

(A note on the title: 'do-decade' is a word invented by the author, conflating the Greek *dodeka*, meaning twelve, with the word *decade*, a 10-year period, to produce 'do-decade', to indicate a period of twelve years. The 'do-' is pronounced as in 'doh', but a play on words here allows it also to be read as the 'do' decade, the decade of democratic action in LIS. There is a perfectly good word *duodecennial*, meaning 'occurring every 12 years, but it does not quite cover what is intended here.)

The idea of a central body to coordinate library services in South Africa was an old one, dating back to the famous 1928 Carnegie visit and the Bloemfontein Library Conference, and beyond (South Africa. Department of National Education. 1991:4) but the first named National Library Advisory Council, NLAC, was established by the Minister of Education, Arts and Science in 1967, essentially to address the implementation of the *Programme for future library development* which had been one of the outcomes of the 1962 National Conference of Library Authorities (Walker 1994c:118,121-2). By the 1980s the effect of information science and information technology on libraries and librarianship had developed to the extent that in 1982 the minister felt it was necessary for the NLAC to be dissolved, and a new National Advisory Council for Librarianship and Information Science was established in its place, centred in the Department of National Education (South Africa. Department of National Education, 1991:9; New advisory council 1982:1-2; Walker 1994c:122). NACLI comprised a chairman and 23 'expert' members appointed by the Minister, including 'library and information experts, information technologists, and experts from government institutions, research councils and certain professional associations'. The list of names of these experts (which includes that of Professor Seth Manaka) suggests that this council was intended to have a high profile within in government and policy circles.(Members of NACLI announced, 1983:1). Its task was broad and included to

- 'advise the Minister of National Education on the formulation and implementation of a national policy and plan for librarianship and information science in the Republic of South Africa;
- ensure that information in its totality (all fields of knowledge) is available in the most effective way and it is applied for decision-making in the attainment of the national objectives, in compliance with, inter alia, the scientific policy in all fields in the public and private sectors...
- serve as a focal point for both the private and public sectors concerning problems and proposals related to librarianship and information science;
- consult with interested and knowledgeable institutions in the Republic and abroad'. (New advisory council, 1982:1-2)

It was not intended to be a democratic, consultative or participative body. In 1985 the then University Librarian at the University of the Witwatersrand wrote that he had noticed the report of a conference organised by NACLI and was 'astounded' that as a senior librarian, he had had no knowledge of this conference, which he felt was of considerable interest to a wider audience of library professionals who had not had the opportunity to date to be involved in NACLI. The response to this letter, on behalf of the Executive Officer of NACLI, put the picture very clearly:

'NACLI, which is constituted from a wide spectrum of professions, is primarily an advisory body for the Minister and may as such not further the interests of only one profession represented on it. Members of the library profession or its subcommittees are free to submit contributions concerning some NACLI contributions to the [SAILIS] Newsletter, but on the instruction of the Chairman, no official contributions will be made by the Council or its staff.' (Musiker, 1985:8)

In due course its task appeared to be too broad and out of line with government philosophy of the later 1980s. Within a few years

'it became apparent that NACLI had entered the terrains of a great number of different principals and could deliver only relatively little usable advice. From this it must be deduced that, if NACLI had continued on this scale, it could have continued making only a limited contribution to the total information system. It would therefore not have been sensible for NACLI to continue with its original terms of reference, composition and *modus operandi*.' (South Africa. Department of National Education, 1991:73)

NACLI was disbanded in 1987 after its first 4-year term of office (South Africa. Department of National Education, 1991:72-75) and Minister FW de Klerk was reported as having arrived at the conclusion that 'information plays a role in all decision making and communication, and that a national policy on information would ... result in his encroaching on the spheres of authorities of others' (Minister disbands council, 1988:9).

The 1992 National Education Policy Investigation (NEPI) LIS report includes an analysis of the role of NACLI in what was then current state policy and suggests that NACLI was disbanded 'because the state did not perceive the LI sphere to be its responsibility' as a result of the emphasis at that time on privatization and market forces (National Education Policy Investigation, 1992:49-50;68). As the ACTAG LIS report put it 'The previous government left the development of the LIS to "market forces", neglecting its responsibility' (Arts and Culture Task Group. Library and Information Services subcommittee. 1995:10).

## **NEPI**

The 'National Education Crisis Committee', NECC, formed in 1985, was renamed in 1990 the National Education Coordinating Committee and, as such, initiated the ANC's National Education Policy Investigation into education policy and services for a future South Africa. The outcome of the investigation was published by Oxford University Press in 13 volumes of reports in 1992, of which one was *Library and Information Services* (National Education Policy Investigation, 1992). The late addition of a LIS research group and subsequent publication was due to the insistence of a group of largely KwaZulu-Natal based librarians from the Library and Information Workers Organization, LIWO, that policy for the future of LIS in South Africa was part of the education policy spectrum (Walker, 1994c).

In its final chapter *Towards policy options*, the NEPI report does not offer a structure for a national council or board but explores, under the heading 'governance', a range of options for location and responsibility for control of LIS. The NEPI authors fully anticipated the problems that would arise from the diverse nature of the LIS sector:

'This research has identified a wide and diverse range of individuals, constituencies, bodies and organizations who are important agents in constructing, contesting and changing policy ...

It is important to recognise that divergence and conflict is inherent in the process of formulating policy, and the possibility of participating in the process has important consequences both for the perceived legitimacy of the exercise and the product of the consultation.' (National Education Policy Investigation, 1992:72)

NEPI suggested options for the location of overall responsibility for and financing and control of libraries in one single ministry or more than one different ministries. Similarly, two options are offered for the responsibility for formulation of policy and decision making in the 'LI system'. The second, 'Partnership' option incorporated the creation of a statutory mechanism such as a council or board, 'representing professional interests, agencies active in the field, and elected representatives from user communities', which could advise the responsible ministry/ies on legislation, act as a monitor and communication channel (National Education Policy Investigation 1992:72-73). Representation would normally include professional practitioners through a professional body; at the time of writing there was no 'unitary professional association' in South Africa, but that role is now filled by the Library and Information Association of South Africa, LIASA, established in 1997.

NEPI felt that the 'Partnership' statutory council option would offer many features advantageous to the South Africa LIS sector, but warned that to implement, they would require legislation and funding.. The features of such a council would include that:

- it would have its own budget and permanent staff funded by the state;
- it would act as the interface between the state on the one hand, and the organized profession and employing institutions on the other;
- it would promote accountability;
- it would allow for representation of a variety of constituencies. NEPI envisaged that these would include user groups.
- It would be able to mediate an understanding of the best professional practice to the relevant ministry/ies;
- It would participate in drawing up standards and formulating policy;
- It would promote democracy through participation because users would be able, to some extent, to determine the nature of the services provided, by way of joint decision-making about policy – for example, setting agendas, programmes and priorities for LIS;
- It would recognize the contribution made by NGOs and non-governmental institutions and facilitate cooperation and rationalization of effort. (National Education Policy Investigation, 1992:73)

It was left to those working in the TransLis (Transforming our Libraries and Information Services) coalition formed in October 1992 while NEPI was drawing to a close, and the LIS Task Team appointed to work on the Centre for Education Policy Development, CEPD, Implementation Plan for Education and Training, to develop detailed structures for such a council. The debate around its structure and responsibilities would rage across the LIS sector for much of the decade.

### **TransLis**

TransLis emerged from the NEPI LIS project, which had for the first time brought together representatives of a range of LIS bodies and individuals. Its stated mission was to

'develop a national library and information service policy and programme which directs the process of participatory change and reconstruction of South Africa's libraries and information services, both regionally and nationally' (TransLis Coalition [1993c]:3).

It was intended as a catalyst, 'mobilising its constituency to start a process of reconstruction and reconceptualisation' and among its aims was 'to develop and recommend policy which will lead to a transformed and restructured local, regional and national library and information system which will serve all South Africans'. A complex structure was envisaged, through which 'grass-roots participation was regarded as essential to the process of reconstruction so that practitioners recognise their role as change agents' and regional workshops were planned to convene and build on the policy options outlined in the NEPI LIS report (TransLis Coalition [1993c]:3-7).

TransLis developed with enthusiasm and met in regional forums and at a national level; much of its logistical and administrative support in the then Transvaal and for national meetings came from the READ organization, through Cynthia Hugo. The relationship between regional and national structures and operations of TransLis as set out in the booklet *Transforming our library and information services* (TransLis Coalition [1993c]) was not however fully realised. Events, most notably the announcement in early 1994 of the formation of an LIS Task Team by the independent Centre for Education Policy Development, overtook TransLis and brought about a bitter split in the LIS sector that affected participation in LIS policy development for many years.

The first indication of this came at the National Education Coordinating Committee (NECC) National Education Policy conference held in Johannesburg at the University of the Witwatersrand on 2-5 December 1993. Presentations by the various policy 'commissions' working on the NEPI project over the period 1990-1992 were delivered, among them a presentation on LIS policy and structure based on the first draft of a policy position paper (The TransLis Coalition, 1993a) that a small TransLis working group had been developing, the contents of which was not widely known by the wider membership of TransLis before the conference. The present author was able to arrange to attend at the last minute as an 'observer' and was able to submit faxed comments on the document received, but it was clear that a 'democratic' process of consultation was not in place outside this working group and copies of the document were not distributed at the conference. It is interesting to recall that the LIS presentation, perhaps because it was very technical about LIS governance structures, evoked only a few questions from the largely young audience, and one statement from the floor that books like Hitler's *Mein Kampf* should not be allowed in libraries.

In addition to the presentation, a document of recommendations on future LIS policy and structure was submitted by the TransLis Working Group to the NECC Conference. These included recommendations on structure:

- to integrate the LIS system with the education system, for a 'qualitatively better education system';
- that LIS be a subsystem within the Ministry of Education;
- for a national LIS council with decision-making powers, comprising the user community, stakeholders and ex officio LIS civil servants
- for such a council to be replicated at provincial level;
- for the council to establish standing committees at national and provincial levels
- for user committees to be established at local levels
- for different types of LIS to be governed as one composite whole.

(The TransLis Coalition 1993a).

The ANC draft discussion document on a policy framework for education and training, distributed in early 1994, reflected these recommendations (African National Congress. Education Department. 1993: 79-82). The section on Policy Proposals states, with regard to structures, that

- 'a LIS Board will be a subcommittee of the National Education and Training Coordinating Council (NETCC) and will comprise stakeholders and representatives of civil society;
- The powers and functions of the LIS Board will be to formulate and develop policy, establish standards, develop mechanisms to monitor accountability and transparency, establish funding allocation criteria, establish coordinating mechanisms for all LIS, and set priorities for extending the national LIS system. The Board will plan the phased implementation of national LIS reconstruction and development plan. The LIS Board will ensure implementation of policy and decisions through a LIS Department within the Ministry of Education and Training.
- Governance of the national LIS system will be replicated at provincial level;
- Local committees will facilitate the coordination and cooperation of all LIS within a geographic area;
- At institutional level, every LIS will establish a user committee to assist and guide LIS workers in developing and maintaining the service.'

(African National Congress. Education Department. 1993: 81-82)

### **Centre for Education Policy Development (CEPD)**

Having originally been commissioned by the ANC to develop the ANC Draft Education Policy Framework, the independent Centre for Education Policy Development was further commissioned to draft a policy within the framework of the ANC document – the Implementation Plan for Education and Training (IPET). In presenting a TransLis Workshop on this document in July 1994, after its completion and presentation to the CEPD Director, Dr Trevor Coombe, in May 1994, Jenni Karlsson, a member of the 4-person CEPD IPET Task Team, filled in much of the background to the evolution of the document and the composition and role of the Task Team. This was one of 20 commissioned for IPET by the CEPD, together with 20 'reference groups' to act as 'sounding boards' for the Task Team's proposals. The LIS Task Team members were Dr Andrew Khutsoane (the Task Team Coordinator), Ms Jenni Karlsson, Dr Peter Lor, and Professor Seth Manaka; 11 additional people formed the reference group. One of the major criticisms at this time in the wider LIS sector as a whole was that these appointments were not widely representative and the process of development of the document was not transparent. Karlsson pointed out at the TransLis workshop that the IPET had been commissioned by the ANC and that the Task Team was therefore 'primarily accountable to the ANC'. (Summary of the TransLis Workshop held on 22 July 1994. 1994:1-2).

The CEPD and the IPET development process attracted criticism from the first announcement of the LIS Task Team at a TransLis meeting in January 1994, where one delegate was famously heard to exclaim to another 'We've been sold down the river!' The Interim Report, the first indication of the contents of the LIS IPET, was submitted to the CEPD in March 1994 (Centre for Education Policy Development, 1994a) and was widely criticised, particularly but not only, by the KwaZulu Natal LIS sector. They indicated to Trevor Coombe in a letter, dated 22 April, to which the names of 102 LIS workers from across several institutions were appended, that

'report backs from several of the Reference Committee members have aroused extreme concern that the procedures followed have not been consultative as claimed in the *Introduction* to the [INPET] Report (final paragraph) ... The seeming lack of commitment by the LIS Task Team to consultation and negotiation is highly disturbing. We are aware that other sectors of the CEPD have been consultative and we are concerned as to why this has not happened in the LIS sector' (Letter, 1994)

Some proposals, particularly those regarding legal deposit, received adverse attention in the press (Library workshop to discuss shock plans, 1994; Urgent E. Cape workshop over ANC library policy, 1994) and in-depth critical annotations handwritten on the CEPD documents by institutions such as the Natal Society Library.

The CEPD LIS Task Team had several terms of reference, among which were

1. To stipulate and elaborate the powers and functions of the LIS Board at national level (the top LIS governance structure).
2. To stipulate and elaborate the powers and functions of the Provincial LIS Boards and their relationship to the national LIS board' (Centre for Education Policy Development 1994a: covering letter).

In sections 3, 4, 7 and 8 of the Interim Report, extremely detailed structures and functions are proposed for a National Council for Library and Information Services (NCLIS), an Office of Library and Information Services (OLIS), a permanent support unit with the Ministry of Education and Training, and a Provincial Library and Information Services Board (PLIS Board) established by each provincial Department of Education and Training. Section 10 describes the role of District Offices in servicing and coordinating a comprehensive range of LIS agencies at district level. The bureaucratic structure within these councils and boards is worked out in detail and is intended to accommodate participation by stakeholders and articulation through linkages at every level from local to national. The proposed competence of the NCLIS is described as follows

' NCLIS will be the main policy-making and coordinating body for community libraries, resource centres, information centres and archives (referred to below generically as LIS agencies) operated by all sectors (state, parastatal, civil society and commercial sectors). It will have exclusive competence in funding, standard-setting and monitoring in respect of all LIS agencies directly controlled or funded by the national

Ministry of Education and Training. In case of other LIS agencies, its competence in these areas will be related to the extent to which the Minister funds and controls them.' (Centre for Education Policy Development 1994a: section 3.3).

The composition of the NCLIS is specified in section 3.5, and is explicitly representative of the nine provincial boards, the full range of LIS sectors, the publishing and bookselling industry, the National Education and Training Coordination Council (NETCC), a person nominated through organisations in civil society and certain others (Centre for Education Policy Development 1994a: section 3.5).

The competence, functions and structures proposed in the Interim IPET Report released in March 1994 (Centre for Education Policy Development 1994a) remain unchanged in the report released in May 1994 (Centre for Education Policy Development, 1994c; African National Congress. Education Department, 1994). A press release from the Director, Dr Coombe, dated 5 May 1994, reflects the CEPD's concern about mounting criticisms of the LIS Task Team's work (including proposals on legal deposit), and states that he has 'asked the LIS Task Team to re-examine their proposal in the light of the representations we are receiving on this issue.' The press release expands on the status of the Task Team and their proposals, and emphasises that

'the Task Team is not an ANC Task Team... A basic principle underlying the work of all the Task Teams is that the democratically-elected government should be advised by competent consultative bodies representing all significant stakeholders. The LIS Task Team makes specific proposals for representative governance bodies to oversee the development of the sector. There is every reason to believe that the new government will not implement new policies in the LIS field without full and transparent consultation'. (Centre for Education Policy Development, 1994f)

On 25 May 1994 an expanded meeting of the Reference Committee was held, for which invitations had been sent to a number of stakeholder organisations and individuals (including Dr Maurice Line of The British Library) to 'look in greater depth at the interim report'. At this meeting concerned critical comments were raised about the perceived lack of consultation with the broad LIS sector; the Task Team Coordinator, Dr Khutsoane, assured the meeting that the proposals as they stood in the report were not cast in stone. There were also conflicting reports about the extent to which the IPET report was a restricted document; Dr Lor, a member of the Task Team, suggested that 'in order to counter the confusion about the availability of the document the finally released version should be printed in large numbers and distributed by the CEPD' (Centre for Education Policy Development. Implementation Plan for Education and Training. 1994e).

The *Implementation plan for education and training* was released by the ANC in May 1994 (African National Congress. Education Department. 1994). Chapter 11, *Library and Information Services (LIS)*, was workshopped by members of the Task Team regionally, in conjunction with other LIS stakeholders, including TransLis in Johannesburg on 22 July 1994. (Summary of the TransLis workshop...1994). Attached to the CEPD LIS document made available at the meeting was a short two-paragraph statement:

'The Task Team is aware that the nature of the task and the time constraints have led to a number of gaps, errors and inconsistencies. The fact that the proposals for national and central structures such as NCLIS and NLSA have been worked out in more detail does not mean that they are considered more important than service delivery; it means rather that the necessary information sources to deal with these components of the national LI system were much more accessible.

Because of time constraints and the demands of the CEPD timetable, the Task Team was unable to engage sufficiently with the actuality of service delivery at grassroots level, in public libraries, community learning centres and school libraries. The Task Team welcomes the opportunity to invite participants at workshops and readers of the report to contribute insights and information in their area of service delivery and in other areas where it had not been possible to do more detailed research and consultation. The many responses, commentaries and critiques already received by the Task Team are much appreciated.' (Centre for Education Policy Development. 1994g).

In the *Introduction* to the IPET John Samuel, Head of the ANC Department of Education, states that 'The IPET is not a blueprint for action but provides a working platform on which to build, and which can assist the national and provincial governments in the urgent task of the reconstruction and development of the education and training system' (African National Congress. Education Department, 1994:iii).

When it was published later in 1994, the famous *Reconstruction and development programme*, (known widely as the RDP), was found to contain only two occurrences of the word 'libraries', in the context of arts and culture, mentioned casually in a list of institutions, and nowhere in context with information. Lor, analysing the RDP from an LIS perspective, commented that "There is no evidence that the compilers of the report have any appreciation of the role LIS can play in national reconstruction and development ... LIS are well down on the list of national priorities' (Lor, 1994:134). As the ACTAG LIS committee put it less than a year later, 'Current decision makers are unaware of the contribution LIS should make to national reconstruction and development, or take LIS for granted, forgetting to mention them in important policy documents' (Arts and Culture Task Group. Library and Information Services subcommittee. 1995:10).

### **COLIS**

As a parallel development to the work of the CEPD LIS Task Team, and partly in frustration at the perceived closed nature of the process, public and community librarians within the then Transvaal Provincial Library Services formed a 'Public Library Strategy Group' at a meeting on 24 February 1994 of the Forum for Public Librarians, comprising practitioners in the PWV, the North, the North-West and the East. A covering letter to the first draft document released for comment by this group on 22 April 1994, describes the purpose of this meeting as being 'to review the Public/Community Library's position within the LIS, to determine the role of public/community libraries in the new dispensation and to make this document available for consideration' (Transvaal Public Library Strategy Group: Policy Task Group, 1994a). This first draft document was submitted to the CEPD Task Team for their consideration.

A second draft was published on 13 May with a covering letter from the convenor, Elke Hansen, expressing the desire of public/community librarians to contribute to the drawing up of a national policy for LIS, specifically for public/community libraries, and inviting commitment in a personal capacity to the process of developing a final draft of the document, for distribution to all library workers for support and approval (Transvaal Public Library Strategy Group: Policy Task Group, 1994c).

The 3<sup>rd</sup> draft document was released in July 1994 and widely distributed (Transvaal Public Library Strategy Group: Policy Task Group, 1994b). It was made available to the TransLis CEPD workshop on 22 July. The Group also submitted comments on the Interim IPET to the CEPD, expressing concern that the approach to LIS. was 'too much a top-down approach and is too top-heavy', and indicating that insufficient attention had been paid to public and community libraries. It was suggested that the COLIS policy document be incorporated by the CEPD as its policy on public and community libraries.

In this 3<sup>rd</sup> draft it was proposed that community library information services COLIS should be located at a national level with the Ministry of Education, that a national Council should be established and that the council should include 'proportional representation from COLIS, with a permanent subcommittee representing COLIS. A detailed COLIS representative structure a national, provincial and local level was included in the Guidelines document (Transvaal Public Library Strategy Group: Policy Task Group, 1994b).

### **LISDESA**

During 1994 parallel planning was initiated, by TransLis and by a joint SAILIS-ALASA committee, for a conference, or 'round table' involving major role player organizations. Confusion, communication problems and mutual suspicion inevitably brought about divisions in the organized LIS bodies. The historic ALASA/SAILIS joint conference under the title Libraries in Developing South Africa (LISDESA). The conference took place on 23-26 January 1995 in Durban and was attended by 235 delegates (*Library and Information Services in Developing South Africa*, 1995.) but some members of LIWO preferred not to participate. At the final plenary session of the conference two events with far-reaching consequences took place:



- A motion was accepted and a steering committee was nominated to address the formation of a national 'one voice' LIS organisation. This led directly to the launch of LIASA in July 1997;
- The chair of the State Library Board and a member of the Minister of Arts, Culture, Science and Technology Task Group (ACTAG), Professor Elize Botha, announced that she had been asked to convene an LIS ACTAG subcommittee to develop LIS policy for a new ministry. The core members of the subcommittee were Professor Botha, Mr Ramesh Jayaram, Director of Johannesburg Public Library, Museums and Art Gallery, and Dr Peter Lor, Director of the State Library (*Library and Information Services in Developing South Africa*, 1995., Pt 1, 1995:99). The name of the third library professional, Mrs Shona Wallis of the Natal Society Library, was accidentally omitted; she had also been nominated like the other two for ACTAG in August 1994, and was the fourth member of the core committee. A further two were co-opted (Mr William Bennet and Mr Arnold Kuzwayo) 'to ensure a membership more representative of the LIS sector'. Nine provincial ACTAG representatives were also nominated. (Arts and Culture Task Group. Library and Information Services subcommittee. 1995:2-3).

### **ACTAG LIS Report**

When this report was published, separately as Chapter 6 of the *Report of the Arts and Culture Task Group*, in July 1995, after several drafts and discussion documents (which are reflected in the list of References appended to this paper), the numerous submissions and the wide discussion and consultation process were all documented in sections identified as such in the Table of Contents (Arts and Culture Task Group. Library and Information Services subcommittee, 1995:iii-v).

In her Foreword the Convenor, Professor Elize Botha, stated that

'Although strenuous efforts were made to ensure the widest possible participation on the drafting of this chapter and to keep members of the LIS community fully informed about the ACTAG-LIS process, time constraints and the perennial threats of misunderstanding and communication gaps often thwarted the best intentions' (Arts and Culture Task Group. Library and Information Services subcommittee. 1995:vi).

The report was accepted with a 75,6% vote by delegates at the National Conference on Arts and Culture, held on 31 May-6 June at the CSIR Conference Centre, Pretoria. It is the only report in the 10 year NEPI-CEPD-ACTAG-IMWG-NCLIS process that was ever put to the vote in a national forum.

The Introduction clarified the mandate and the composition of the Subcommittee; the apparent transfer of LIS from the Education Ministry to the Ministry of Arts, Culture, Science and Technology was due in part to the technical fact that the 'newly established Department of Arts, Culture, Science and Technology (DACST)' was the successor of the Department of National Education and had inherited the responsibility for national libraries and the small subdirectorates of Meta-information, which had 'some responsibility for national library and information policy' (Arts and Culture Task Group. Library and Information Services subcommittee. 1995:1-2). It was also because, as noted in the full ACTAG Second Draft Report in May,

'the Department of Education has not so far acted upon the NEPI and CEPD proposals directed to it, and that the recent White Paper on education [published in 1994] has to all intents and purposes ignored libraries' (Arts and Culture Task Group, 1995:219).

The location of the LIS sector within government and the structure and governance of LIS were addressed, as in the CEPD INPET, in detail. After reviewing the options, the report proposes that 'overall policy-making, coordinating and legislative responsibility for LIS should be located in DACST' and proposes further that 'It should be the responsibility of a separate Library and Information Services branch (i.e. on an equal footing with Arts and Culture and Science and Technology)' (Arts and Culture Task Group. Library and Information Services subcommittee. 1995:17-20).

The document as a whole, and the process followed by the Subcommittee, clearly reflects an awareness of the problems and criticisms experienced by the CEPD in 1994. The various drafts of the report and the ACTAG process had also been criticised:

'Since the release of the Subcommittee's two reports there has been widespread and strongly expressed disquiet about the composition of the Subcommittee and the manner in which it was constituted. The lack of transparency was deplored and it was stated that members should not have been appointed but should have been democratically elected and mandated by interest groups to speak on their behalf' (Arts and Culture Task Group. Library and Information Services subcommittee. 1995:3).

Yet despite a cheerfully informal assurance in the preamble to one of the earliest discussion documents, that ' This document contains no sacred cows. Everything in it is open for discussion, starting now' (Arts and Culture Task Group. Subcommittee and Library and Information Services (LIS), 1995b:3), the present author has a copy of her own comments compiled and submitted after the February 1995 ACTAG LIS discussion document and the LIS chapter of the April 1995 full draft ACTAG report had been circulated, in which it is recorded that the impression then given by the document was

'one of a bid by the DACST to control, through a powerful policy-making LIS council with a limited representative structure at the national level, all LIS activity throughout the country. Proposals for LIS policy making ... and the imposition and monitoring of its implementation, is set out in highly authoritarian terms.' (Walker, 1995a:2).

Viewed retrospectively after 10 years of democracy and two elections, of a decade of very public media debate and criticism of government decisions at every level, the anxiety and anger generated in the workshops and comments around ACTAG and its predecessors may seem misplaced. But anyone who lived through that time as a professional will recall the often irrational anger that was ever-present, and the sense that important decisions would be made and implemented without transparency.

Complex structures and proposals are set out in Section 5 of the report, *Structure and Governance*. During the process of public meetings, at both provincial and national levels, there were issues of departmental alignment and governance which could not be resolved, and one member of the core committee, Mr Ramesh Jayaram, was tasked with holding further community meetings in which a 'significant degree of consensus' was reached (Arts and Culture Task Group. Library and Information Services subcommittee. 1995:vi). Nevertheless, the task of advising the Ministers on mechanisms to ensure good governance of LIS, and the location of these mechanisms, was referred to an Interministerial Working Group (IMWG) appointed during 1995 by the Ministers of Arts, Culture, Science and Technology and of Education (Interministerial Working Group on Library and Information Services (LIS) Function (National level), 1997:10).

It was assumed in the ACTAG-LIS report that there would be a structured democratic relationship between LIS at the national, provincial and local levels, with

'consultative LIS bodies which will be required at the various levels of government. This implies that stakeholders at the institutional, local and provincial levels should also participate in decision-making on the nature of consultative bodies at their own and higher levels' (Arts and Culture Task Group. Library and Information Services subcommittee. 1995:27)

The report goes on to suggest that a similar structure and process might apply to the national consultative body or bodies:

'This would imply that the establishment of, for example, a national LIS council should be held over for a few years until structures have been established at the local and provincial levels ... this would leave a policy vacuum in the LIS at the national level during a critical period when the RDP will be in full swing...' ( Arts and Culture Task Group. Library and Information Services subcommittee. 1995:28).

(It turned out that there would be a delay of 7-8 years, until 2001 when the NCLIS Act came into existence, 2003 when the first Council was announced, and 2004 when the new Council met for the first time.)

Various models were proposed for structure and governance of LIS at the national level (Arts and Culture Task Group. Library and Information Services subcommittee. 1995:26-41). These were consolidated into

- Model A, comprising a large elected, broad-based national forum and a smaller partly elected, partly appointed national Council;
- Model B, a council alone, which would be a large (40-60 member) consultative body comprising both representative elected and Ministerially appointed members, with a small directorate in DACST, and a smaller (14 person) executive and 4 subcommittees for community, school, tertiary and national library services;
- Model C, a national Council and panels. The Council would be a national coordinating body of 25 appointed members, structured and composed to ensure representivity, and responsible for

'the optimal development of LIS and optimal utilisation of information resources in South Africa. In accordance with the Interim Constitution it is particularly charged with redressing the inequalities spanning urban and rural communities, gender, class and race groups across the Republic'

So-called panels were to be set up for any of the LIS sectors and disciplines.

All the models are set out in great detail. The responsibility of the National LIS council would be to develop national policy for South African LIS as a total system and draw up a reconstruction and development programme for LIS, and would lay down 'guidelines for the coordination of the total South African LIS sector' (Arts and Culture Task Group. Library and Information Services subcommittee. 1995: 42).

In many ways, and outside the area of government activity, the outcomes of the LIDESAs working groups had foreshadowed much of this. (*Library and Information Services in Developing South Africa*, Part 2. 1995).

The National Council that emerged in the 2001 Act most closely resembles Model C. No analogous LIS provincial bodies, as recommended in both CEPD and ACTAG reports, were established, and the IMWG proposed a different linkage between the national and provincial levels.

### **The Interministerial Working Group (IMWG)**

Chapter 1, *Introduction and background*, of the report of this Working Group, gives a full account of the process leading to the decision made jointly during 1995 by the Ministers of Arts, Culture, Science and Technology and of Education that a Working Group should be established to address issues arising from the debate around the location of the focal point of LIS. The WG comprised 14 members, many of them from the academic libraries sector, chaired by Professor Seth Manaka. (Interministerial Working Group on the Library and Information Services (LIS) Function (national level), 1997:9-12). The ACTAG LIS report indicates that during 1995 'speculation about [the IMWG's] brief and composition (about which ACTAG LIS has not been informed) have added to the confusion and concern' about the issue of alignment of LIS (Arts and Culture Task Group. Library and Information Services subcommittee. 1995: 17)

The terms of reference of the IMWG were published in October 1995. The WG was to advise the two Ministers on

'mechanisms to ensure good governance of the library and information system at the national level to facilitate maximum availability and use of all relevant information sources to advance the Reconstruction and Development Programme.'

Recommendations would be made on the location of these governance mechanisms, the possible establishment of a national advisory council, the relationship between national and provincial structures and functions, and the role of IT at the national level to facilitate access to information. (Interministerial Working Group on the Library and Information Services (LIS) Function (national level), 1997:13)

The draft report of the IMWG was dated June 1996 but not widely released for comment until October 1996. Criticisms were made that a document of this importance should have been made more widely and easily available for considered comment before the return date. Within the South African Institute for Librarianship and Information Science (SAILIS) comments submitted were cautiously positive, although public librarians expressed concern at the perceived lack of representation of public librarians on the Working Group (Comments on the *Draft Report of the Interministerial Working Group...*1996)

On the matter of a national advisory council, the report indicated that issues reflected in the differences of opinion among LIS practitioners on the functions and composition of such a council had been further discussed with stakeholders in consultations conducted by the WG and that 'consensus has now largely been reached' ((Interministerial Working Group on the Library and Information Services LIS) Function (national level),1997:11).

In Chapter 5, *Advisory and coordinating mechanisms* (Interministerial Working Group on the Library and Information Services (LIS) Function (national level),1997:18-22), the WG recommended that the unit for policy matters within DACST should remain the focal point for LIS policy at national level, but that DACST and DoE function as equal partners regarding LIS issues by means of an Interdepartmental Coordinating and Planning Committee.

The composition and key functions of a national advisory council were proposed in some detail; including criteria for guidelines in the nomination process to balance representativeness with expertise, the sectoral interests with national interest, and acceptable democratic and transparent process for nominating stakeholder representatives. No directly representative or electoral process was proposed. For coordination between national and provincial structures, a MINMEC council of ministers and members of provincial executive councils was proposed in place of previous 'mirror-structures' of the national body at provincial or local level.. The IMWG referred to the Draft White Paper on Arts Culture and Heritage and recommended that a national advisory council for LIS be established as recommended in paragraph 50 of the Draft White Paper. (Interministerial Working Group on the Library and Information Services (LIS) Function (national level),1997:21-22).

#### **Draft White Paper on Arts, Culture and Heritage 1996**

With the release of Chapter 6 of the July 1995 ACTAG report, the process for implementing proposals moved to the stage of drafting a White Paper for comment (Arts and Culture Task Group. Library and Information Services subcommittee. 1995:vi). The final version of Chapter 6 was distributed to the LIS Community 'to enable informed participation in the ongoing debates leading to legislation' (Arts and Culture Task Group. Library and Information Services subcommittee. 1995:vii). A draft White Paper on Arts Culture and Heritage was published for comment in June 1996, reflecting outcomes of the ACTAG process and the input and views of the Department and the Ministry (South Africa. Departments of Arts, Culture, Science and Technology, 1996b:9). The White Paper stated that libraries constitutionally were viewed as a provincial competence (as they still are), and that the coordination, development and finance of community libraries were a joint responsibility of provincial and local governments. (South Africa. Departments of Arts, Culture, Science and Technology, 1996b:28). It recommended, however,

'that a national advisory council be established to assist in the formulation of LIS policy, to provide coordinating networks and mechanisms and set priorities for extending national LIS. It will provide a vehicle for coordination at national level and may advise provinces on linkages between the national and provincial governments (South Africa. Departments of Arts, Culture, Science and Technology, par.50, 1996b:28).

#### **National Advisory Council on Library and Information Services**

In August 1997 a communication was sent from the Director General of the Department of Arts, Culture, Science and Technology to LIS stakeholders, advising that in order to 'address the vacuum that exists' in regard to slow progress on the establishment of a National Council which had been recommended in various policy initiatives since 1990, the Department was considering including the

establishment of the Council in the *National Libraries Amendment Bill 1997*. An annexure to the Bill contained draft clauses on proposed Council. A second draft of the proposed legislation was circulated in September 1997 and Mrs Rykie Cillie of DACST made a presentation on the legislation to the Council of SAILIS at the SAILIS conference on 21 September (South Africa. Department of Arts, Culture, Science and Technology, 1997a, 1997b).

Comments were invited and those compiled on behalf of SAILIS (which had already resolved to disband following the formation of LIASA) reflected a concern that a national LIS association should play a 'greater and more decisive role' and have ex officio representation on the Council. This was perceived as particularly relevant in the light of positive statements made about the organized profession by the then Deputy President Mr Thabo Mbeki and Ministers Bengu and Mabandla on the occasion of the establishment of the new national association, the Library and Information Association (LIASA) in July 1997. (Comments on proposed legislation on the National Advisory Council for Library and Information Services (NACLIS): 2<sup>nd</sup> draft, September 1997.1997)

By 1999 the Annexure had been reworked and was presented as a draft Bill in its own right (South Africa. Department of Arts, Culture, Science and Technology, 1999). LIASA was invited to participate in an informal working group at the offices of the subdirector of Meta-Information at DACST in Pretoria to 'panel beat' the clauses, particularly those relating to the composition of the Council. The new Bill and its composition was discussed in various LIASA forums, including a discussion led by the present author at the AGM of the Gauteng South branch in August 1999. Many of the changes proposed by LIASA during 1999 were incorporated into the Bill.

On 25 June 2001 the *National Council for Library and Information Services Act, 2001*, No. 6 of 2001, was published. (South Africa. Acts. *National Council for Library and Information Services, No. 6. 2001*

The functions of council include, as listed in section 4 of the Act, to

1. Inform and advise the Minister and the Minister of Education on
  - a) the development and coordination of library and information services;
  - b) the promotion of cooperation among library and information services;
  - c) legislation affecting library and information services;
  - d) policies, principles and criteria that should govern the allocation of public funds for library and information services
  - e) existing adequacies and deficiencies of library and information resources including literature in African languages and services;
  - f) the effectiveness of library and information science education and training
  - g) service priorities
  - h) promotion of basic and functional literacy, information literacy and a culture of reading.

The council is also required to play a coordinating, liaison and advocacy role in relation to LIS matters, and to submit a report annually to the Minister and the Minister of Education, and the report must be tabled in Parliament by the Minister..

Members of the Council must be appointed, or nominated and appointed, according to the procedures set out in paragraph 7, but they are not elected as representatives. The chair is appointed by the Minister. The nomination process is specified in detail and was followed in the nomination process that led to the appointment of the first council in October 2003.

## **Conclusion**

The Chairman of the NCLIS, and hence the Council, reports to the Minister and the Minister of Education, who in turn reports to Parliament. While it is therefore true to say that the NCLIS does not report to the LIS sector as a whole and is not accountable to them, South African LIS stakeholders have come a long way since the first NLAC was appointed in 1967 and they have learnt many lessons from South Africa's first 10 years of democracy. As this paper has hoped to show, LIS workers as a profession have a history of demanding the right to know and to participate in the policies and processes that govern the services they deliver. Their expectations have been met more successfully at some times than at others.

The establishment of the NCLIS in a form very different from its original vision in the early 1990s, and over an exceedingly protracted period of time, is a victory for those who believe that government has a vital role to play in delivering LIS and access to information to South Africa communities at every level. As Ms Buyelwa Sonjica said on 11 March at the inaugural meeting of the NCLIS, in her capacity as Deputy Minister of Arts, Culture, Science and Technology,

' We will all recall how important the sharing of information during the struggle years was and how precious information is to sustaining human rights ... Libraries play a vital role in this Freedom of Information environment, especially in a developmental sense. Democracy can only be sustained by providing access to all the information necessary for our citizens to take informed decisions ... LIS in South Africa should be revitalized from the bottom up, with the Council steering and coordinating new ideas and initiatives for restructuring the LIS sector.' (Sonjica, 2004)

This was the hope of the NEPI "library activists" in 1992, a 'do-decade' ago.

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