

Blue Shield Australia and the DISACT Symposium, Canberra 6 May 2010
Report by Shauna Hicks, Australian Society of Archivists

The Australian Society of Archivists recently became an associate member of Blue Shield Australia (BSA). This report is a brief introduction to BSA and a review of the DISACT Symposium recently held in Canberra at the National Library of Australia and is based on a talk given to the Victorian Branch of the ASA on 13 May 2010.

What is BSA?

- ▶ It is the cultural equivalent of the Red Cross. BSA is an international committee, working to protect the world's cultural heritage threatened by armed conflict and natural disasters.
- ▶ It is a member of both the Association of National Committees of the Blue Shield (ANCBS) and of the International Committee of the Blue Shield (ICBS).

What does BSA do?

- ▶ It advocates for the Australian government to meet its obligations under the UNESCO 1954 Hague Convention for the Protection of Cultural Property in the Event of Armed Conflict, and for the government to sign the first and second protocol.
- ▶ Acts as a central communication point, bringing together the organisations that represent Australia's galleries, libraries, archives, museums, monuments and sites.
- ▶ Advises and assists colleagues whose cultural collections may be at risk.
- ▶ Promotes disaster preparedness and enable the sharing of useful resources across the Australian cultural heritage sector.

Who are the BSA pillars?

- ▶ Council of Australasian Archives and Records Authorities
- ▶ Australia International Council on Monuments and Sites
- ▶ International Council of Museums Australian National Committee
- ▶ Australian Library and Information Association

Who are BSA associate members?

- ▶ Federation of Australian Historical Societies
- ▶ Museums Australia
- ▶ Records Management Association of Australasia
- ▶ Pacific Regional Branch of the International Council on Archives
- ▶ Australian Institute for the Conservation of Cultural Material
- ▶ Australian Society of Archivists

For more information on Blue Shield Australia visit www.blueshieldaustralia.org.au/

DISACT Symposium on Disaster Proofing Heritage Collections

Before reporting on the symposium, I will briefly describe DISACT.

What is DISACT?

- ▶ DISACT ('Disaster ACT') was established by cultural and scientific collecting institutions in Canberra to improve disaster preparedness and provide local mutual assistance in the event of emergencies affecting public collections.
- ▶ DISACT sponsors disaster recovery training, conducts quarterly DISACT Network meetings and has a website resource.

Who is DISACT?

- ▶ Australian War Memorial
- ▶ National Archives of Australia
- ▶ National Gallery of Australia
- ▶ National Library of Australia
- ▶ National Museum of Australia
- ▶ Screen Sound Australia
- ▶ a range of other agencies

All signed a Letter of Intention (LOI) to formalise the arrangement. More information is available on the website www.anbg.gov.au/disact/

Disaster Proofing Heritage Collections

The Symposium was introduced by Jan Fullerton, Director General of the National Library of Australia and launched by Senator Kate Lundy. Her speech is at <http://www.katelundy.com.au/2010/05/06/disaster-proofing-heritage-collections-symposium-launch/>

The symposium had slightly over one hundred registered participants coming from every state and territory with a majority representing collecting institutions large and small from all aspects of the cultural heritage sector.

The Symposium had two themes:

- ▶ The morning session looked at Regional Disaster Preparedness for Heritage Collections and
- ▶ The afternoon session looked at Risk Management of Energy-Efficient, Heritage Collection Storage.

DISACT's Letter Of Intent (LOI) on Cooperative Disaster Preparedness was then launched and signed by many heads of Cultural Collecting Institutions in the ACT region. The aim of the LOI is to encourage a best practice approach in the prevention of and preparation for disasters. The usual obligatory group photo shoot was then held.

Sue Hutley, CEO of ALIA then launched ALIA's *Guide to Disaster Planning, Response and Recovery for Libraries* (www.alia.org.au/disasterrecovery/ALIA_Guide_Disaster_Plan_Resp_Recover.pdf).

There were ten 20 minute presentations which I thought was a good format as it allowed a broad range of speakers and topics to be covered in the one day symposium. The speakers and sessions are listed below with a few of my thoughts on each session.

**Detlev Lueth, National Archives of Australia and Chair, BSA
Blue Shield Australia - building disaster resilience into the Australian and Asia-Pacific heritage sectors**

Detlev gave a comprehensive introduction to BSA and how it operates, its members and associates. The Secretariat was provided by the Collections Council of Australia until 30 April 2010 but is now provided by ALIA on an interim basis until funding can be sourced.

**Bernard Kertesz, Australian War Memorial & Convenor, DISACT
Alert but not alarmed: A decade of the Disasters ACT Network**

This presentation gave a brief background history of DISACT and some of the other models they looked at before establishing DISACT. The development of the LOI was also outlined along with the benefits including shared resources, trained staff, training opportunities etc.

**Roger Trudgeon, Manager/Curator Gold Museum, Ballarat
Planning for floods in a drought: cooperative regional responses to disasters**

Roger gave a personal overview of one of the real life disasters (flooding) at the Gold Museum and what you can do with a bucket and mop. He also gave an overview of the development of the Ballarat Collections Network MOU (see www.prov.vic.gov.au/main/bcn.asp).

Kim Morris, Art & Archival Pty Ltd

Not if but when! Some observations on collection disaster preparedness around Australia

Kim looked at insurance requirements and the need for photos (both before and after) to assist with establishing the recognised value of collections and damage done after a disaster giving University of Western Australia flood examples to clearly demonstrate this. She also talked about business recovery and continuity planning along with risk management and risk assessment and the need for preparedness.

Alexandra Ellem, National Gallery of Victoria

In support of public and private treasures; the AICCM Victorian Division's disaster response to the February fires of 2009

Alex talked about the lessons learned from the Victorian fires. The most important was communication and public awareness of what AICCM could do to assist. For example, people threw out things that might have been salvaged because they didn't know about conservation and what could be salvaged. See After a Fire brochure (PDF)

www.aiccm.org.au/docs/AICCM_Brochures/AICCM_AfterAFire_2009.PDF

Kay Soderlund, AICCM President

AICCM and a national emergency response network

Kay talked about the Have a 'Heart' campaign which is still in the early stages of planning and development. 'Heart' is an acronym for Heritage, Emergency, Action, Response and Team. The campaign will work with cultural and community groups.

**Zoe Scott, Manager WA Museum, Kalgoorlie-Boulder
"Boulder Rocks"**

Zoe gave an account of the April 2010 earthquake in Kalgoorlie-Boulder and showed photographs giving practical examples of damaged buildings and collections. Roofs collapsed, ceilings fell in, walls cracked and it was what is termed a 'Dry' disaster which is unusual as most disasters involve water eg floods or fires with water damage.

Julian Bickersteth, International Conservation Services

Developing updated guidelines for environmental conditions in collecting institutions

Julian explained why it was necessary to update the guidelines due to changes with energy use, tighter budgets, and sustainability of resources and so on. What was being updated included environmental factors, temperature, relative humidity, light etc. Factors to be considered include collections, buildings and people. An AICCM taskforce will gather information on existing research and literature, collate all current projects and develop guidelines for Australian conditions.

Jennifer Lloyd, National Library of Australia

Meeting and reporting "conservation standards" for environmental conditions; the Government's key performance indicators versus the real world

Jennifer referred to the Safe and Accessible National Collections report and in particular recommendations 6 and 14. Key areas are preservation strategies, appropriate storage, care and handling, pest management, copying of fragile collections and control documentation to allow easy access.

Eric Archer and Greer Gehrt, National Museum of Australia

Centre for the National Museum of Australia Collections: a proposal for sustainable collections storage and management

They both talked about the new building for NMA and how it would be a 'super insulated' passive storage structure with a humidity buffer, control of people entering, air quality controls and so on. It is also necessary to accept broader bands for temperature and humidity controls.

Conclusion

At the end of the presentations there was a panel session and question time. For me the biggest attraction was the ability to networking amongst all the sectors at tea breaks and lunch time. There was lots of talking, lots of ideas and enthusiasm and I personally found it inspiring and I came away with a desire to do more. But, like everyone else, I have doubts about finding the extra time and resources to do everything. The symposium was definitely well worth attending. Audio podcasts of the talks will be available shortly together with copies of the PowerPoint presentations on the BSA website.