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LIBRARIES NEED FRIENDS MORE THAN EVER

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I greatly regret that I cannot attend the conference and be with you. Unfortunately, my duties in the High Court of Australia prevent this. But I will be with you in spirit.

My address to the inauguration of the Friends of Libraries Australia was titled "Libraries Need Friends". It has now been published in the *Australian Library Journal* (August 1995, at 113). If anything, the urgency for the need for Friends has been increased by the interval of time since that address was delivered.

We are facing a determined endeavour by the Federal Government to rein in the budget deficit. The Government has a mandate from the people to do this. Most citizens understand the need for stern economies.

One of the basic problems is that those faced with cuts seek, naturally enough, to minimise the pain. One of the apparent ways to do this is with library votes. This is because a lot of books remain on the shelves. The library continues to look much the same. Indeed new technology tends to give a deceptive air of innovation and expansion. But the cutting of

library votes can have a serious effect on the intellectual capital of Australia. It is only when people go to the series and find that it peters out in 1990 or 1995 that the true cost of budget cutting in the area of libraries is felt. The long-term cost may be a diminution of our link to the intellectual developments of the rest of the world.

It is therefore at this time that Friends must speak up for libraries. They must do so to government and within branches of government to defend the public and private libraries of our country which stretch back to the earliest days of settlement. They must do so as citizens so that administrators and economists come to realise the enormous importance of libraries to the intellectual resource of the nation.

I hope that during the conference ways will be found to channel this message to governments at every level of administration in Australia and also to fellow citizens. Libraries are a most precious resource and have been so for humanity since ancient times. We, the Friends, who have benefited from use of libraries all our lives, must raise our voices in defence of them now, as never before.