



THE NEW ZEALAND
SOCIETY OF AUTHORS
(PEN NEW ZEALAND INC) TE PUNI KATUHI O AOTEAROA

75 years of working for writers

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE: Thursday 23rd July 2009.

NZSA alarmed at potential privatisation of libraries

The New Zealand Society of Authors (PEN NZ Inc.) is alarmed at reports of the proposed law changes to Local Government allowing councils to strip local spending back to core services (defined as transport, water services and public health and safety). The proposed changes to the Act puts at jeopardy libraries and art galleries, potentially removing the right of free access to these community facilities from the very people the local councils were designed to support.

The New Zealand Society of Authors (PEN NZ Inc.) considers such community facilities to be vital to the present and future growth and development of the people of New Zealand. Libraries provide facilities for the elderly, children and students and for lower socio-economic communities. Such facilities would be unlikely to attract sufficient private sponsorship and it is the responsibility of local government to ensure provision of facilities of general interest that are commercially unviable. By removing the requirement for local councils to provide such services free of charge would put at risk the educational, recreational and social activities of our communities today and in the future.

It is widely acknowledged that ratepayers, by and large, are happy to pay for art galleries, libraries and the like. It has been generally acknowledged by our politicians that social policies are an important role for councils. And yet the Cabinet has signed off on a request to review local government law that includes the removal of council's requirements to deliver on 'community outcomes' – a contradictory and unacceptable move.

The Local Government Act 2002 (as at 1 July 2009) states that the purpose of local government is
to promote the social, economic, environmental, and cultural well-being of communities, in the present and for the future

It also states that

If a local authority or a council-controlled organisation provides a library for public use, the residents in that district or region are entitled to join the library free of charge.

We urge the Government to ensure that it remains a requirement of local government to be responsible for the social and cultural wellbeing of its community, and to provide free public access to community facilities. We reject any changes to the Local Government Act that allows any local governing body to commercialise such facilities.

ENDS

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