

# Publishing packages and pressures

## Book prices and new book importing arrangements

There has been an opinion prevalent in Australia for many years that the prices of some imported books have been excessive by comparison with the cost of the same books overseas, partly to take advantage of cheaper overseas prices but also because many books

simply have not been published in Australia. In this sense publishing means making a book available to the public. The book does not have to be made in Australia.

Unlike libraries and private individuals, booksellers have been prevented by the Copyright Act from importing copies directly from overseas. They have been compelled to purchase overseas books from the owner of the Australian copyright. In effect this has meant that the Australian copyright owner has had a monopoly and can set whatever price the market will bear

without fear of competition for that particular book. Of course there is competition where another title may be just as acceptable to the reader, as with many novels and other popular lines.

Further frustration has been caused by long delays between when a book has been published overseas and when it has come onto the Australian market. Readers of book reviews of the overseas edition seek particular titles from booksellers, only to be told that the book concerned is not yet available in Australia. In many cases it may never be published in Australia.

Particularly galling has been the fact that Australian market rights have traditionally been part of a package of British and Commonwealth market rights. The American edition could not be sold in Australia yet the British publisher might take a long time to publish an Australian edition or never publish it at all.

These concerns led the Attorney-General, some years ago, to ask the Copyright Law Review Committee (CLRC) to consider whether changes should be made to the relevant sections of the Copyright Act. The reference covered not only books but all copyright materials, such as recordings, films, computer software.

After taking a lot of evidence and holding public hearings the committee made recommendations to relax the importation provisions of the Act in ways that would ease the problem of availability. It told the Attorney-General that it did not have the necessary powers to enquire authoritatively into prices and suggested that this might be done by a body explicitly empowered to do so.

The Government then asked the Prices Surveillance Authority (PSA) to hold an inquiry into book prices and its final report was issued in December last. The PSA recommended that the copyright restrictions on the importation of non-pirate copies should be removed except in the case of books by Australian authors published in Australia.

The Government has decided not to go as far as the PSA recommended. Instead it has broadly accepted the recommendations of the CLRC interpreting them in a way which will place heavy pressure on copyright owners to publish in Australia quickly and to keep their books available.

Under the new policy copyright owners will in future lose their monopoly if a book is not published in

### From 5 ....

'The disappointing aspect of our fundraising campaign has been the insular view displayed by some sections of the library industry which have been unable to see the relevance of promoting what is after all a multi-million dollar national information network. This means we haven't received the financial support we expected and we have fallen short of our fundraising target. Sponsors are still being sought.

'Even though it is metropolitan based, the Library Tram has already received state-wide attention and will be promoted nationally and internationally.

'The design of the Library Tram was selected from three original con-

cepts developed by young Victorian artists. The winning entry by Andrea Cameron, a final year Graphic Design student from the Prahran campus of Victorian College, was a well executed response to the brief. The theme for the Library Tram is Libraries are for Everyone.'

For the next 12 months the Library Tram will continue to operate along Melbourne's tram routes. Currently it is operating from the Brunswick depot along the Sydney Road - Royal Parade - Elizabeth Street route.

Enquiries about the Library Tram project are welcomed. Please contact Sue Noble at Camberwell City Libraries on (03) 811 0390.

Sue Noble  
Chairperson  
Victorian Public  
Library Expo Association



Victoria's Library Tram - a world first.

▶ From 7 ...

Australia within 30 days of first publication overseas. What this means is that, where this is not done, booksellers may freely import non-pirate copies from whatever source they please.

Where the copyright owner has published in Australia within 30 days, but runs out of stock and cannot supply within 90 days, booksellers are again free to import from overseas. However the copyright owner recovers monopoly control once it has copies available again.

The provisions will not affect books published before the new arrangements came into force.

## What will be the consequences?

In future books will become available more promptly in Australia either through publication or importation by booksellers. However if they are published in Australia within 30 days they may cease to be available for periods of up to 90 days, and during that period booksellers may not import the overseas edition unless they hold a specific order from a customer who requires the book for non-commercial purposes. It would be greatly preferable for booksellers to be able to import as soon as the copyright owner was unable to supply copies. Moreover there will almost certainly be administrative problems as books go in and out of availability.

Books published until the new arrangements come into force will remain subject to the traditional arrangements. This means that the old monopoly will remain for most books for a very long time to come. It is not clear from the ministerial announcement whether the provision permitting

a bookseller to import if a specific order is held, will apply to already published books. It would have been much preferable for the 90 day provision to be applied to all books.

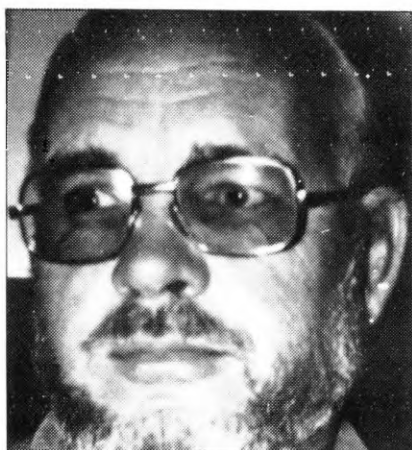
And prices? Well it always was doubtful whether changes to the importation provisions would affect prices, very much except where there was a cheaper alternative edition. One area where price competition will appear, is where a paperback edition available overseas is not published in Australia. In those circumstances a locally published or imported hardback edition will have price competition. In some cases, fluctuations in currency rates may make overseas editions competitive with the Australian edition.

Books are more quickly remaindered overseas than in Australia and books which have not met the requirement to be published in Australia within 30 days of overseas publication will receive competition from remainders more quickly than before.

In other cases reductions in price were always improbable. The market for many specialised books is so small and the cost of supplying the limited market so high that competitive pricing does not occur.

To sum up, in future new books published overseas should appear more quickly in Australia. Out of stock problems for many books will still be frustrating, a situation which could have been avoided, while still retaining the same policy direction, if the Government had adopted a more stringent interpretation of when a book is not available within a reasonable time. And there will be competitive pricing for some books, especially where there is an alternative paperback edition.

*Derek Fielding*  
University of Queensland  
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Derek Fielding

# Library usage doubles

The State Library of Queensland has recently received two awards for its new building. These are a Certificate of Merit for Public Buildings from the Building Owners and Managers Association (BOMA) as part of the BOMA Queensland awards for 1989, and a commendation by the Royal Australian Institute of Architects (RAIA) Queensland Chapter.

Public reaction to the new building in the 18 months since its opening was exceptionally good. Usage has more than doubled by comparison with the old building in William Street.

A number of new services have been commenced in the new building. These include an Audio Visual Unit, a Childrens' Library, a Genealogy Unit, a Business Information Service and a Liaison Unit.

The publicity associated with the building and its new or improved services has resulted in a number of notable acquisitions mostly through donation. These include, of course, the James Hardie Library of Australian Fine Art, the best collection of its type in the world valued at \$3 million. In addition, the Palmer Collection consisting of more than 8000 records of opera and music has been received.

Other notable collections include the Cable Collection of Hymnology and Folk Music, the Eber Bunker Maritime Collection, 17 000 photographs donated by Dorothy Coleman, a leading Brisbane photographer, and the personal records of former Queensland Art Gallery Director, James Weinecke. The records of Tarong Station represent one of the most significant collections of pastoral history in the State. The publicity has also been very valuable in attracting donations to the State Library of Queensland Foundation, which has now reached the \$1.1 million mark.

The exhibition area has proved to be very successful with a wide range of displays including Ethel Turner's childrens books, The World of Banjo Paterson, French Revolution Posters, Australia's Italians.

*Des Stephens*  
State Librarian  
State Library of Queensland

