

Libraries and Australian books

InCite readers will recall John Cook's Article 'Buy Australian' in the February 21 issue of *InCite*. Response to it included a letter in the May 9 issue and a section of the 'Notes from the Executive Director' in the May 23 issue.

Cecil Florey, Principal Librarian Technical Services of the State Library Service of Western Australia, has sent *InCite* a copy of a letter he has written to Laurie Muller of the University of Queensland Press on the topic. Laurie Muller's views were quoted in John Cook's article. Cecil Florey suggests that libraries support Australian publishing more generously than the article suggested. The letter follows:

12 April 1986

Mr Laurie Muller
University of Queensland Press
PO Box 42
St Lucia QLD 4067

Dear Mr Muller
John Cook contributed an article to 'InCite' for 21 February '86 in which he quoted the views you have expressed about the lack of support of Australian publishing by public libraries and school libraries.
To see where the State Library Service of Western Australia stands in relation to the purchasing practices of other Australian institutions, I have arranged for a small survey of our stock of some of the authors mentioned by John Cook. Now we, as all other institutional book buyers, are strapped for funds: we cannot get enough funds from State Government sources to meet the heavy demands of all our associated public libraries and their readers. We believe that we spread our funds around as well as possible, given that we must get a broad range of titles if we are to provide an effective library service. Currently, Australian books are claimed to have a cost advantage over British and American books, because of the dramatic effects of devaluation: but we do not attempt to push Australian books on our public librarians just because they are of Australian authorship. A free market operates, and we supply what in the judgement of the public librarians is wanted by the thousands of well-informed users of public libraries.

So the numbers of copies which we have purchased of the following titles reflect a stated demand for those titles. Compared with our purchases of overseas books, the ordering level is quite comparable. Only titles from 1983 or later have been surveyed.

Peter Carey Illywhacker	: 31 copies
Peter Corris Heroin Annie The winning side The Australian family quiz book Make me rich Pokerface The big drop	: 16 copies : 21 copies : 32 copies : 38 copies : 23 copies : 16 copies
Beverley Farmer Home time Milk	: 15 copies : 5 copies
Helen Garner The children's Bach Postcards from Surfers	: 53 copies : 29 copies
Rodney Hall Just relations Australia, image of a nation The Australian	: 16 copies : 40 copies : 40 copies
Elizabeth Jolley Miss Peabody's inheritance Stories Milk and Honey Foxybaby	: 56 copies : 27 copies : 35 copies : 54 copies
Thomas Keneally Outback The cut-rate kingdom A family madness Schindler's ark (large print ed.)	: 44 copies : 46 copies : 81 copies : 51 copies
David Malouf Harland's half acre Antipodes 12 Edmonston Street	: 35 copies : 52 copies : 23 copies
Olga Masters Loving daughters A long time dying	: 52 copies : 28 copies
Thomas Shapcott White stag of exile Holiday of the ikon	: 16 copies : 49 copies

We have also analysed all the book orders placed by the State Library Service of WA between 1 July 1985 and mid-April 1986, to check the distribution of these orders by national origin of the titles. We buy both for the State Reference Library in Perth (generally in single copies) and for all the public libraries associated with the State Library Service (generally in multiples, typically as listed for the authors above).

For the State Reference Library, the distribution of orders since 1 July is:

	Titles	% of total
Australian origin	5521	53
UK origin	2298	22
US origin	2262	22
All other origin	298	3
	<u>10 379</u>	<u>100</u>

The State Reference Library practices blanket buying of virtually all Australian titles published, which gives the remarkably high purchasing rate shown above.

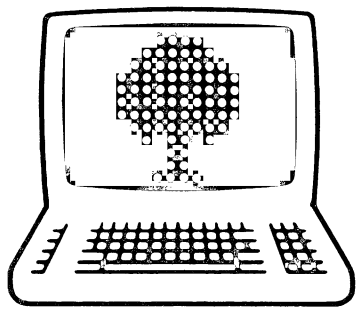
For the public libraries, for whom all buying is selective, with titles and quantities determined solely on merit, and a generally 'mass-market' selection policy, the distribution of orders is:

	Titles	% of total
Australian origin	3522	25
UK origin	7624	54
US origin	3012	21
All other origin	31	0
	<u>14 189</u>	<u>100</u>

This is still a notable bias in favour of Australian titles, particularly when one considers the wide variations in publishing output of each of the three major countries.
If Western Australia's purchasing pattern is typical of State, public and school libraries throughout Australia, then I suggest that the support given by libraries to Australian publishing is much more generous than John Cook's article would indicate.

Yours sincerely,

Cecil Florey
Principal Librarian: Technical Services



AUSTRALIAN BOOKTRADE NETWORK

- USA, UK, Australian and New Zealand Books in Print Online
- Electronic Ordering
- Electronic Mail
- Bookshop Management System
- Directory of Booksellers, Publishers and Libraries.

Full details from:
Adelaide – Jim Franks 268 1933; Brisbane – George Notaras 369 5877;
Canberra – Hazel Williams 47 0988; Melbourne – Ian Jamieson 544 8433; Perth – Don Young or Phillipa Baines 322 2730; Sydney – Adrienne Lambert or Amanda Russell 437 6322;
Head Office – Steve Cartland (02) 437 6322.

BOOKNET