

## LETTERS

**Book prices****Dear Editor,**

The 5 March issue of *inCite* included contributions on the issue of book prices in Australia from Geoff Allen and Derek Fielding. Geoff characterised the 'official' view of ALIA as cautious, and asked whether it represented the view of the membership at large. As the author of the 'official' view, I can answer his question: I have no idea whether the viewpoint I put on behalf of ALIA represents the membership at large; it certainly represents me, among others, but librarians have a wide range of views. Because of the time available, I had little opportunity to consult, and the predominant view was ignorance of the issues.

There is a wide range of viewpoints. If total deregulation, as espoused by the Prices Surveillance Authority (PSA) can be regarded as the extreme left (and it could equally be regarded as the free market extreme right), the 'official' ALIA view could be characterised as centrist: to the left of the ABPA (publishers), many authors, the ABA (booksellers), slightly to the left of Derek Fielding and the Copyright Law Review Committee (CLRC), and to the right of the views of the PSA and what may or may not be the minority bookseller viewpoint. Since then, the Commonwealth Government has announced measures for partial deregulation which appear to be slightly to the left of those recommended by the CLRC.

The final report of the PSA was issued on 18 December; it takes into account subsequent debate and supplementary submissions, and responds to major issues of concern which have been raised. The PSA stands by its conclusions that the importation provisions of the Copyright Act 'have been used by publishers to exercise international price discrimination' and should be repealed.

Geoff makes out his own very simple version of the PSA case: the Curtin University study has established that the average price differential between actual bookshop price in Perth and overseas 'local price' (not actual bookshop price overseas) is 51.81 per cent, and therefore we are being overcharged, on average, by 51 per cent. (The PSA found the pricing differential to be 31 per cent).

In fact Australian book consumers are interested not only in price, but in three issues: price, timeliness and availability.

With regard to price, there is no doubt that there is a substantial price differential, and no doubt in my mind that it is due in part to exploitation of the closed market by publishers. However, other factors affect price as well: freight and shipping costs, the costs of Australia's fragmented and inefficient distribution system, economies of scale or their absence, and the ability of booksellers to take advantage of the scope for direct importation of books which would be created by full deregulation. We do not know to what extent prices would fall with deregulation, nor for whom they would fall.

With regard to timeliness, the Commonwealth Government's proposed amendments to the Copyright Act seem likely to be effective in reducing the gap between overseas and Australian publication, if not effective in other ways.

The third concern, availability, is an unknown. The matter is of concern to libraries and individual book buyers: we do not know whether deregulation would lead to the stocking in Australia of a smaller range of titles.

The main point of the ALIA viewpoint was that we should attempt to find out the answers to these questions through a period of partial deregulation which would be carefully monitored. While I have some reservations about the detail of the Commonwealth Government's proposed partial deregulation, I still believe that it is a short-term solution, and that further changes are likely to be necessary.

*Derek Whitehead*

Director

Collection Management  
State Library of Victoria

**Lofty theory impacts****Dear Editor,**

As most of your readers will not be aware of my views on the book prices question, which were the subject of an ill-informed tirade by Geoff Allen in your 5 March issue, perhaps you would allow me to state them.

There is quite justified concern that new titles are often withheld from the Australian market for long periods after publication overseas and sometimes never published in Australia at all. This is normally either because the, usually British, owner of the Australian

rights does not care sufficiently about the needs of Australian readers or does not believe that the title will be profitable in Australia, or that no Australian publisher buys the rights from the, usually American, rights owner.

It is also the case that the prices of many books are higher in Australia than the straight conversion of the overseas price would justify, and that in the case of books with a limited market in Australia, prices can range from very high to quite unreasonable.

The question is, would these problems be solved by abolishing all territorial copyright provisions in Australia and establishing a completely deregulated market, bearing in mind that similar territorial copyright provisions exist in other countries with which Australia normally compares itself, such as Britain, the United States, Canada and New Zealand. Indeed the British Act has recently been strengthened by adopting words from the Australian Act which increase the rights of the local licensee. This is interesting in a country where the government has championed the sort of deregulation philosophy which the Prices Surveillance Authority and Geoff Allen support.

The fact is that Australia is a small market and no amount of deregulation will create competition for a great many books for which there is a limited readership in Australia. For instance if the measures proposed by the outgoing Attorney-General, Lionel Bowen, are adopted I would predict that prices will remain high for books not published within Australia within the prescribed thirty days of overseas publication because few booksellers will wish to incur the cost of specially importing them and risking their capital without seeking a handsome profit.

And it is not true, as Allen claims, that Australian publishers are not protected by the Copyright Act or the closed market. Australian publishers who publish overseas titles are protected against parallel imports and thus have some certainty when they take the risk of investing capital in such titles. Where they publish Australian titles, and the rights to that title are also sold to overseas publishers, they are protected against the reimportation of cheaper or remaindered overseas editions of those Australian titles into the Australian market.

For Allen to claim that 'it is, of course, nonsense to suggest that a locally published edition of a living Australian author could be legally undercut by a cheap overseas published edition, unless the owner of the copyright agreed to it' simply demonstrates

that Allen does not know what he is talking about. It happens now, but at least the Australian copyright owner has legal redress if he wishes to take action. Once the market was deregulated, the Australian copyright owner would have no redress at all.

The case put by the publishers is that the present arrangements allow books to carry the same recommended retail price, which is not a net price as in UK, whether it is on sale in Sydney or Marble Bar. It allows them to hold in Australia a much wider range of stock than would be possible in a deregulated market, and to supply retailers on a sale or return basis. This allows many booksellers to carry stock which they could not afford to hold if they had no opportunity to return unsold copies. A deregulated market would undermine these arrangements, with large chain stores like Myers importing large quantities of best-selling titles directly from overseas and taking away many of the most profitable lines from ordinary booksellers.

The present system, say the publishers, allows them to invest the income from publishing overseas titles into publishing books by Australian authors. Without that income they would not have the capital with which to foster new authors or publish many books of Australian interest with a limited readership. Many specialist services, such as those offered to schools by educational suppliers, would cease to be viable if part of their market was undermined by cheap imports from overseas.

Australian publishers also point out that there are unusually high costs in servicing the Australian market, with a comparatively small population scattered across a large continent. Their market power in purchasing Australian titles is limited because of the small quantity involved, and the cost of advertising and distribution is quite different from that in densely populated countries like Britain and the USA.

One does not have to accept all of the publishers' arguments before having some concern about complete deregulation. Obviously most industries would like to have market protection of the kind offered by territorial copyright. At the same time there are sufficient differences between publishing for the Australian market and publishing for large overseas markets to warrant some caution before throwing the market open. The proposals of the Copyright Law Review Committee substantially, but in my view overcautiously, adopted in the 'Bowen proposals' represent a middle way between the present overprotected market and the

complete deregulation proposed by the Prices Surveillance Authority. In the classic phrase, they avoid throwing out the baby with the bathwater.

It is fine for new right economic theorists to pontificate about the values of the free market. But realists have to weigh the possible impact of lofty theory on Australian business and the Australian public.

Derek Fielding  
University Librarian  
University of Queensland

#### Linos report

##### Dear Editor,

I have recently been informed that the Australian Library and Information Association intends to publish the report of the former project of National Significance, the Learning and Information Needs of Schools (LINOS). Your Association's intention to publish the report is of concern to the Education Department of South Australia for a number of reasons.

Although this Department was represented on the Project Steering Committee, the final version has not been seen either by the Steering Committee member or by the Head of School Libraries. It is our belief that, while parts of the version which we have are useful, the philosophical stance of the document is at odds with the South Australian view with regard to the role of school libraries and resources in student learning and curriculum development. The document cannot be seen, therefore, as representative of the national viewpoint.

Because the initial purpose of the Project was to produce a publication to replace *Books and beyond*, the previous national guidelines, it would seem likely that the new publication will assume the status of *Books and beyond*. Since the current document apparently has neither the support nor the endorsement of the Department of Employment, Education and Training (DEET), its credibility nationally must be highly questionable.

Our specific concerns are:

- Throughout the document, there is no evidence of an understanding of the necessity for students to be effective users of information. The document focuses on the information resource themselves, not on the process of accessing the information contained in the resources.
- There is very little about the role of technology in accessing information.
- Meeting the needs of students with special needs is almost entirely ignored.

- In the proposed evaluation procedures, there is no attempt to assess the effect of the library services on student learning. The dangerous conclusion to be drawn is that the two are unrelated.

I urge your Association to reconsider the decision to publish the LINOS report. In the document's present form, the Education Department of South Australia is unable to endorse it or support its use by schools in this state.

Garth Boomer  
Associate Director-General of  
Education (Curriculum)  
Education Dept of SA

## A question of standards?

Between its Sydney and Melbourne Information Centres, Standards Australia answers over 200 enquiries a day from exporters, importers, manufacturers and consumers who need to know about Standards relating to a wide range of products and services. Standards Australia holds an up-to-date reference collection, the only one of its kind in Australia, of Standards and related publications from Australian, International and overseas organisations. Staffed by professional librarians, the Information Centres provide an expert specialist reference service to clients. This service, handled mostly by telephone, is available to both members of Standards Australia as well as to the general public.

Standards Australia is the point in Australia through which Standards from any of the 65 countries in the International Standards Organisation Network (ISONET) are available for purchase.

A recent acquisition is Perinorm — a CD-ROM database which has resulted from the cooperative efforts of the British (BSI) German (DIN) and French (AFNOR) national Standards organisations. This database, up-dated monthly, brings together bibliographic information on the current Standards from these three countries as well as International and European Standards.

For assistance with Standards enquiries contact your closest Standards Australia Information Centre: Sydney — (02) 963 4263, Melbourne — (03) 347 7690.



### Dear Editor,

I was once rural and isolated, but did receive my copy of *inCite* in time to apply for positions advertised and to attend some functions listed in the Happenings column.

Now I am urban, still isolated and get my copy of *inCite* after the closing date for applications and much too late to attend any activities.

A cover date of 19 February, and a received date of 8 March 1990 is just not good enough. If there are problems please could someone come clean and explain?

Vicki Williamson  
Curtin University of  
Technology

PS I'm not a good speller or a typist, so I didn't notice the typos and spelling errors in Vol 11, No. 1!

### Editor's reply

I know that life is not worth living without *inCite* to read, so I do apologise for the delay with issue 1, especially right at the beginning of the year after such a long intellectual drought (Christmas break).

While we expected a bit of tough going with the ALIA Publications Unit not yet complete, and new staff still in a settling-in period, we didn't quite anticipate major difficulties with the computer hardware and software. These caused the first issue to disappear into the unknown along with all backups, which were corrupted in the course of unsuccessful attempts at correction and retrieval.

Days were lost while a substantial amount of the work involved in producing *inCite* was carried out a second time, and design and editorial quality control went down the tube. To add insult to injury a transport strike held up delivery of paper stock! Although we continued to be plagued with computer difficulties and issues 2 and 3 also suffered, we feel we have resolved the last of these.

The Publications Unit has additional responsibilities including ALIA Press titles, however the Canberra arrangements and inhouse production of most stages of *inCite* should ensure *inCite's* prompt arrival on all members doorsteps, urban or rural. Thank you for your patience and continued support.



Unfortunately Frances Bluhdorn was 'felled' by the traumas of our first issue. Apologies indeed to Frances and congratulations once again.

Mary Ann Ross (left) presents Frances Bluhdorn with the Anne Harrison Award 1989.



**K**enneth Myer was the 1989 recipient of the Redmond Barry Award. As you can see Kenneth looks nothing at all like Allan Fleming! Congratulations to both distinguished members and once again apologies for the mix-up in *inCite* 1. Kenneth Myer's citation follows.

### Kenneth Myer

Kenneth Baillieu Myer has in the last 30 years given outstanding service to the National Library of Australia and to the Australian library profession.

Kenneth Myer served on the National Library of Australia Council for 21 years, an unparalleled record of public service to the library. Its Annual Report, 1981-82, fittingly refers to this in the following terms:

'The Chairman of the Council, Mr K B Myer, retired on 22 March after more than 21 years' distinguished service to the library. Mr Myer, who had been Chairman since August 1974, was appointed a member of the Interim Council in October 1960 and served continuously as a member of the Council from the establishment of the library on a statutory basis in March 1961.

He was closely involved in the planning for the library building and in the application of new technology to the library's operations, particularly in the field of computer-based services.'

What this published record for obvious reasons cannot make clear is the time, effort and restless enthusiasm which Kenneth Myer also brought to the library's cause. He came to the council at a time when he had heavy responsibilities to his business interest, but quickly established a reputation for thorough preparation for council meetings, and for raising and pursuing significant issues.

These included the question of adequate financial support for the library, where his business background was of considerable advantage to the library. He took a particular and constructive interest in the question of gaining government approval for the construction of the National Library building, but also spent much time and effort developing his knowledge of library matters, and in pursuing National Library interests overseas.

Kenneth Myer, while chairman of the National Library Council from 1974-1982, was also an informed and articulate advocate of its interests in a range of public forums. He also established the National Library of Australia Trust Fund, and through this action the policy of seeking private sector support for the library.

He has, since vacating office on the council, nonetheless continued his financial support to the library through regular capital donations to its Trust Funds, the income of which has enabled the library to undertake projects of advantage to the broader library community, but on occasion also outside the normal opportunities available through government funds.

The most obvious example of this in recent years is of course the Australian Libraries Summit. The concept of the Summit planning process very much attracted Mr Myer's interest at the stage it was being developed, and a separate and special donation of \$20 000 from him in 1987, largely funded the Summit's central expenses. It goes without saying that he himself, notwithstanding his strong personal interest in the Summit planning process, as usual, attached no conditions to this donation nor sought to influence the Summit planning process itself.

In addition to his involvement with the National Library of Australia, Kenneth Myer has also over the last 30 years demonstrated a deep interest in broader Australian library matters, and has been an articulate and committed advocate on the profession's behalf. His appointment as a Companion in the Order of Australia in 1976, demonstrates his national standing as a man of affairs participating in a wide range of intellectual and cultural forums.

In all of them, he has when appropriate, articulated the profession's interest, but especially concerning the nation's need for dynamic scientific and technological information services and effective broad information planning, with libraries as a major participant.

The Redmond Barry Award may be conferred by the Australian Library and Information Association on any lay person not employed in a library who has rendered outstanding service to the promotion of a library or of libraries, or to the practice of librarianship.

Mr Kenneth Myer has in the last 30 years given outstanding service not only to the National Library of Australia but also to the Australian library profession. The General Council of the Association, considers him a most worthy recipient of the Award.