

Your voice

Copyright on the net

The tone of Brendan Scott's article in the May 1999 issue of *inCite* seems to leave one without any comfort at all. Whilst Mr Scott is correct in his assertions regarding the ownership of works on the internet, he makes no mention of the defences available to users under Sections 40-43 of the *Copyright Act 1968*, the so-called 'fair dealing' provisions, which apply equally well in the online world as in the print environment. These sections allow copying of a reasonable portion of a work for the purposes of research and study, criticism and review, the reporting of news, and the provision of professional legal advice, as well as copying for judicial proceedings. It seems a pity that these exceptions, as well as the library provisions of the *Act*, which most of your readers will invoke daily, were not mentioned.

Whilst users certainly need to be aware that copyright is alive and well on the internet, it is also worth mentioning that there is a considerable amount of non-protected material, in the form of works in the public domain, United States Govern-

ment material, and other items which have been made freely available. A mention of the use of e-mail to obtain permissions and licences from owners would also have given us some hope. Although the internet is changing, there is enough of the original resource-sharing spirit of the 'net remaining to ensure a good chance of success for such requests.

It seems entirely reasonable that we should bring the old exceptions into the digital area. Those exceptions are what we understand, they are what has worked for us, and they make a good starting point. If it's found after a period that they cause problems, then that is the time to change them, when the problems are understood. And I cannot imagine a time when libraries will become mere billing agencies for collecting societies, the more so whilst libraries continue to ensure that the library exceptions in the *Copyright Act* are preserved.

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Your letters on any issue of relevance to the library and information sector are welcomed.

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