

29 May 2007

Kerri-Ann Smith
Classification Review
Classification Policy Branch
Australian Attorney-General's Department
Robert Garran Offices
2-4 National Circuit
BARTON ACT 2600

Submission from:

Australian Library and Information Association (ALIA)
Council of Australian University Librarians (CAUL)
National and State Libraries Australasia (NSLA)
Australian Law Librarians' Association (ALLA)

We welcome the opportunity to comment on the **Material That Advocates Terrorist Acts Discussion Paper**.

The government's proposal is to amend the national Classification Code to include the requirement that publications, films and computer games that 'advocate terrorist acts' be refused classification.

We believe that the government's proposal has major implications on Australians' right to freedom of speech and thought. We oppose the expansion of the Classification Code to include censoring of ideas that could be seen to be political ideas and believe that the amendments represent a fundamental change to the Code.

We support the submissions provided by the Australian Society of Authors and by Alex Byrne, a personal submission informed by his current position as President of the International Federation of Library Associations.

Preserving democratic society

Censorship and limitations on the free flow of information undermine democratic society and strengthen the cause of those who seek to destroy it. The most effective way to preserve democratic society is by making available the widest possible range of viewpoints, opinions and ideas so that all individuals have the opportunity to be informed.

We believe that human rights and intellectual freedom are inextricably linked. We support Article 19 of the United Nations *Universal Declaration of Human Rights*:

Everyone has the right to freedom of opinion and expression; this right includes freedom to hold opinions without interference and to seek, receive and impart information and ideas through any media and regardless of frontiers.

Australia's liberal and tolerant way of life is based on respect for each others' views and the freedom to state our opinions without fear of retribution or arrest. The freedom to read, hear and see what we want is a central element of the Australian way of life. We may disagree with others but we respect their right to express their views.

Australia has already seen a number of publications taken out of libraries and taken off shelves (we refer to the forced removal of two books from the University of Melbourne Library in July 2006). It is a dangerous step to allow governments to censor material when it suits them because the risk is that they will extend the reach of that censorship to other types of material that they determine should be banned or removed from shelves.

The need for critical scrutiny

Refusing classification to selected material takes away not only our right to read the opinions of others but also our right to disagree with what they say. We cannot refute what we cannot read. If we disagree with ideas in publications, then we should refute those ideas, not ban the material that contains them.

In the context of the post-September 11, 2001 world - and after the terrorist outrages in Madrid, London, Bali and Thailand, it is even more important to 'know your enemy'. If we cannot read what extremists are saying, we cannot understand their thinking or present alternative views nor can we guard against their threats.

For universities, the freedom to research and study is central. Universities exist to educate the leaders of the future and to research important matters for society. It is essential that our students and researchers can study the difficult questions of what poses a threat to Australia whether it be environmental damage, economic risk or terrorist threat. If the students and researchers cannot read the opinions of others - including the most extreme - then they cannot research the issues effectively.

It is the role of Australia's university and other libraries to make available the information which enables that research. If they are constrained from doing so, we are all at risk. By banning material and not exposing it to critical scrutiny and debate, it could conceivably help the spread of ideas advocating terrorism.

Conclusion

The proposed amendments to the national Classification Code threaten both our freedoms and our capacity to respond to terrorism. We are committed to contributing to a future that values and protects freedom of speech and the free flow of information and ideas.



Sue Hutley
Executive Director
Australian Library and Information Association

on behalf of ALIA, CAUL, NSLA and ALLA

Background

The Australian Library and Information Association (ALIA) is the professional organisation for the Australian library and information services sector. It seeks to empower the profession in the development, promotion and delivery of quality library and information services to the nation, through leadership, advocacy and mutual support. *Website: <http://www.alia.org.au>*

The Council of Australian University Librarians (CAUL) supports its members in the achievement of their objectives, especially the provision of access to, and training in the use of, scholarly information, leadership in the management of information, and contribution to the university experience. CAUL is comprised of the library directors of all Australian universities. *Website: <http://www.caul.edu.au>*

National and State Libraries Australasia (NSLA) objectives are to promote and advance the provision, awareness and use of library and information services in Australia; provide a consultative forum for state and public library service management in Australia; enable the formulation of common plans, policies and programs for state and public library services; and allow for the common views of state and public libraries to be presented to government, and to other relevant bodies. Membership consists of the head of each State and Territory Library, the National Library of Australia and the National Library of New Zealand. *Website: <http://www.nsla.org.au>*

The Australian Law Librarians' Association Inc. (ALLA) is the national organisation for librarians and information professionals working in courts, government departments, law firms and legal areas of universities and professional associations. The Association acts as a single voice to lobby on a range of issues which will promote the interests of law libraries and provide legal information services in the wider community. *Website: <http://www.allg.asn.au>*

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