

Copyright consumers launch alliance

The Australian Digital Alliance was launched in Canberra on February 26. Coordinator Annabelle Herd explains the new organisation's goals

As the government acts to bring Australia's *Copyright Act* into the digital age, for the first time in Australia, a diverse group of public and private sector interests has united to ensure that a balanced, public interest perspective is effectively voiced in the copyright debate.

The Australian Digital Alliance (ADA) is a unique new coalition of public and private sector interests formed to promote balanced copyright law. ADA members include schools, universities, Internet industry groups, consumer groups, major cultural institutions, computer software producers, scientific and other research organisations, libraries and individuals.

The ADA was officially launched on February 26, 1999 at Parliament House in Canberra by Professor Dennis Pearce, chair of the Copyright Law Review Committee (CLRC). As an original convenor of the ADA, a message of support from Sir Anthony Mason, former Chief Justice of the High Court of Australia, was also read out at the launch. Other speakers included Mara Bun of the Australian Consumers' Association and Tom Cochrane from Queensland University of Technology.

The ADA has been formed in response to fears that hasty and ill-conceived solutions to the challenges posed by digital technology may lead to overprotection of copyright at the expense of research, learning and innovation in this country. As Australia moves toward becoming an information economy, the stakes in the copyright debate are clearly being raised and the issues that surround copyright and its associated costs, liabilities, and potential for restricting open competition and access to information, are increasingly relevant in determining the face of our digital society.

In Australia, the fundamental purpose of copyright law has always been to encourage learning, research, creativity, and thereby the advancement of society. As such, the ADA has been formed to promote the view that it is essential to Australia's future as an information economy that copyright laws reflect an appropriate balance between strong protection of intellectual property rights, and reasonable access to information, ideas and knowledge.

As stated by Sir Anthony Mason in his statement for the launch: "Gradually we are beginning to accept the obvious truth that our greatest asset, our greatest commodity, is the talent of our people. To enable that talent to be exploited, we must strive to put in place terms that are equitable to user and provider of access to information, ideas and learning."

With the host of recommendations and reforms on the table for discussion, 1999 is already shaping up to be a big year in

Australian copyright law reform.

Arguably, there has never been a more crucial time to participate in the copyright debate. In relation to each of the proposed reforms, ADA concerns can broadly be categorised as issues related to access, cost, liability, and competition. In particular, the ADA will work to outline the dangers of overprotection of copyright and other intellectual property rights in relation to current legislative proposals.

In this, the ADA will focus on issues of concern to all copyright consumers such as the implementation of an open ended and flexible fair use provision, the use of copy protection systems, anti-competitive licensing practices and liability issues.

The ADA will:

- represent private and public sector copyright consumer interests;
- provide advice and expertise to government on intellectual property policy;
- advance the role of copyright within the national information economy; and
- integrate activity with like-minded alliances internationally such as the Digital Future Coalition in the U.S.

Due to the importance of the issues, the ADA will also work to raise awareness and encourage public debate on issues relating to copyright protection in the digital age.

More information on the ADA, its membership, and its principles can be obtained by contacting Annabelle Herd, ADA Coordinator, on telephone (02) 6262 1273 or email aherd@nla.gov.au

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