

To the Productivity Commission Inquiry,

I am Tom Skeehan, the director of SKEEHAN studio, a furniture design company founded in 2012 based in Canberra ACT. My studio designs and develops original furniture. All my products are manufactured in Australia for distribution in Australia and Asia.

I have invested the past 5 years building my company SKEEHAN studio ground up. Based in Canberra the company now has a team of 4 under my employment. I am a contributor to the University of Canberra as a design lecturer and involved in many Australian arts and design based organizations. At the core of my business is design led innovation, focusing on local Australian manufacturing, new technologies and sustainable production methods. This is complimented by an inclusive lifecycle analysis of the product, its life expectancy and contribution to society.

I have personally exhibited my studio's work in Singapore, USA, Milan and will be taking my newest folding chair to New York later this year.

It has become clear to me through my professional interactions with the international design community that Australia is severely behind in regards to supporting its design industry. A quote from my colleague and fellow exhibitor at LOCAL DESIGN Milan Design Week, Toby Jones summarized my feeling perfectly:

"Its embarrassing when you are talking to galleries and fellow designers overseas and the first thing they ask you about is why there is so much counterfeit furniture in Australia? It creates an uncomfortable situation when you are trying to open new doors but you are conscious that Australia has a reputation for ripping off other designers" Toby Jones, Milan 2016.

Personally, the most concerning component of our current IP laws is that we do not have a grace period to protect Australian Designers during the development of new designs before they're resolved enough for IP registration. The UK model allows designer a 2 year grace period intended for product development and industry feedback. After this period the designer can choose to register such design. We don't have this kind of protection in Australia and it has severely hindered my studio's growth and will continue to hinder its development.

Allow me to give an example. My newest folding chair that I recently exhibited in Milan and will be launching in Australia and the USA in November has been affected by the current lack of IP protection. The chair has been in development for 3 years with a personal investment of more than 90k dedicated to the project. Throughout the development the project it received necessary feedback from industry and potential distributors in the form of exhibitions and product pitches. At this time the product wasn't refined enough to justify the registration process. Now that the project has received the necessary feedback and data I'm prepared to put it into production, with another personal capital allocation needed in excess of 35k. However, with the inadequate laws that we have in Australia I would have had to register the design before any person from the public has seen it and the chair can not now be protected. Good design requires the public to see a design prematurely for the necessary feedback process to occur, but this then renders that design prematurely unprotectable.

The current state of IP laws in Australia are hindering my studio's development forcing me to look at relocating the business offshore to countries like the UK. To insure my business can innovative and design furniture that I can legally protect.



Tom Skeehan, HUP HUP folding chair. 2016

