

Right to repair submission

By Simon Gnieslaw, 31 January 2021

Introduction

I am an IT specialist from Melbourne, and a consumer. I advocate for civil rights, and I believe very fundamentally that we as free people should have the right to do with our property as we please, as long as it does not hurt anyone else. This includes being able to fix products we own by ourselves, or to have someone else fix it for us, without artificial barriers put in place by Government or Manufacturers to limit those freedoms.

I repair and refurbish some electronics myself, mostly Personal Computers.

I also hire others who are appropriately qualified to fix items outside my skill set. This includes as electronics which are very delicate, mechanical repairs on my car, or high voltage items which would be illegal for me to do myself.

I support empowering consumers with Right to Repair, as a matter of public interest.

Giving consumers a Right to Repair opens up a valuable resource to Australia and supports thousands of jobs in the industry, with room to grow and be a powerful economic centre, just like Australia's other commodities.

My reasoning is as follows:

Large multinational companies outside Australia are fighting Right to Repair and harming Australian consumers

I have been following Louis Rossmann, of Rossmann Repair Group on YouTube. He is a prominent campaigner for the Right to Repair movement. He has published many videos on his journey of advocating for Right to Repair in the United States.

Some common themes are:

- Very aggressive lobbying by the manufacturers
- Manufacturers who make design decisions in their products which appear to have no other purpose than to make the product difficult or impossible to repair, such as the use of strong glue to bind separate components together where glue would not be necessary for any other reason
- Manufacturers not allowing a supply chain of spare parts, and going to extraordinary lengths to restrict supply. For example, making their “recycling” partners shop circuit boards into smaller pieces, making agreements with companies not to supply their microchips to anyone else, stand over tactics, inappropriate use of laws, pretending to co-operate with legislators but actually not making a genuine effort to do so.

When these companies do these sorts of things in the United States, which is where most of these product design decisions are made, the effects are that these products are made in a way which hurt consumers’ options globally, including Australian consumers when they end up reaching our market.

Support Australian Small Business & Healthy Competition

Australia is full of small businesses. It is part of our way of life. It is truly remarkable that with a bit of technical know-how, someone can pick up a Phillips Head screwdriver and become a Computer Technician. Or a 10mm Socket and become a Car Mechanic. These are the hard workers who keep the economy moving by fixing all our machines, required to do other business, and for home, contributing much to society and pay taxes.

There are literally thousands of Computer Technicians, Phone Repairers & Automotive Mechanics around Australia. There are also more niche industries such as Lift Repair to make sure people don't get stuck in lifts, and Biomedical technicians who keep the hospital equipment running which saves our lives.

Manufacturers are actively working to cut these people out of work, or give them very limited roles working for them, in favour of selling more products brand new in the factory, over issues which could have been easily repairable if there was an official right to repair.

Independent Repairers have a certain relationship with their customer (the consumer) to work in their interests rather than the interests of the manufacturer.

If Independent Repairers were unable to continue Independent Repair, consumers would be at the mercy of the manufacturers not to take advantage of their market position to exert large amounts of money for technically simple repairs, and pricing repairs in a way where it may be more economical to buy a new product even if the old one was easily repairable in an economic way if Independent Repair was possible.

Support Australian Consumers

If you buy something, or at least spend a lot of money on it, you should have the freedom to basically use it as you see fit. It's yours. It should be up to you how it's used, how it's modified, how it's repaired.

Manufacturers often overplay the safety issues, especially regarding Lithium Batteries, but these are risks easily managed when repairers who are trained, properly qualified & licensed to handle such things.

The schematics should be provided as part of the product, as well as a reasonable process to be able to overcome software faults. If the manufacturer is able to clear the fault, then there should be a way that the same fault can be cleared by the consumer or their nominated repairer, or if there are some security implications, then be done remotely by the manufacturer and at a reasonable cost.

For example a microchip might need reprogramming for a Tractor on a farm. Instead of having to wait weeks/days for a new programmable microchip to arrive from overseas by post, a local repairer might have a spare microchip on hand, and the tools to be able to program that microchip (either directly or with manufacturer assistance) to give to the Farmer. This would turn downtime on the farm from Weeks to Hours.

Waste, Environment & Economy

Products which can't be repaired, especially due to manufacturers making efforts for them not to be, ends up as waste which needs to be disposed of properly as not to cause contamination of the land.

This is a cost on Australian rate & taxpayers, when really it should be a cost on the consumer who decides to buy products which have a low score on repair-ability.

Perfectly good components are currently going to waste, when these components could be recovered and sold as a valuable commodity to offset to the cost of recycling components which are not economical to recycle on it's own.

There is a market for recovered valuable components, which is a resource that Australia can export.

I propose two things:

1. A board sitting under the ACCC made up of experts of an Engineering background relevant to consumer products, who can score a product on it's repair-ability and environmental impact.
2. If a product scores too low (i.e. not very repairable even though there could have been easily made design changes making it repairable), then a tax should be added to cover the cost of it's disposal.

Manufacturers would naturally want to keep the end-user price lower so they would have the incentive to make the product more repairable to avoid the tax, and then when the product is eventually disposed of, the cost of that disposal is recovered through the value in it's spare parts, and the excess value is a resource for Australians to make money offerings

National Security/Continuity

With rising tensions across the globe, Australia has become dependant on the technology of other countries, as we do not have much manufacturing industry left.

Currently the NBN is facing a crisis where they are running out of parts to grow the network due to a combination of tensions between US and China, and COVID manufacturing impacts.

With a right to repair, we can become self sufficient to keep the economy running should any interruptions occur due to Geopolitics or Pandemics.