

Right to Repair Submission

Presented by the Repair Café Hobart Management Committee

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We, the Management Committee of Repair Café Hobart, appreciate that the Honourable Josh Frydenberg has requested that the Productivity Commission undertakes this enquiry into the 'Right to Repair' situation in Australia. We are grateful for the opportunity to make this submission.

The Productivity Commission in their Issues Paper recognise that there is no simple universal definition of the 'Right to Repair'. They state that their aim will be to provide a balanced view between the rights of consumers, producers and the businesses which populate the spaces in between e.g. repairers and spare parts providers. The Productivity Commission also states that their aim is to consider what would prove beneficial to the broad community over time including the importance of consideration of the environmental impact of resultant policy changes.

Our experience in this space is in voluntarily managing Repair Café Hobart. Our Repair Café follows the international model established in the Netherlands in 2009 [About - Repair Café \(EN\)](#) Repair Café Hobart opened on October 19th 2019 and is a one of over two thousand Repair Café's in operation across the world including currently forty five in Australia. (N.B. There are many other community groups who provide a similar service who do not operate under the Repair Café umbrella.)

At Repair Café' Hobart community members bring broken items from home and repair them with the help of a volunteer with the needed skills and expertise. Our aims are to encourage the development of a self-sufficient and sustainable repair culture which consequently reduces waste while developing community connection and contributing to people's wellbeing. We have found that many of the people who attend do not have repair skills and there is evidence that these skills may be lost in the future. Participants are empowered by learning to make repairs from people who feel they can contribute to their community by passing on their skills.

The ingenuity and inventiveness of Australians is recognised and valued around the world. If people lose the capacity to attempt their own repairs Australia will lose an important source of future innovations. Innovation results from the opportunity to exercise creativity and the limits imposed by many manufacturers on access to their products, repair manuals, spare parts and specialty tools is a barrier to innovation.

One criticism of Repair Cafes is that because they are free they are in competition with professional repair specialists. The participants at Repair Cafés are usually there because they have been unable to find a local repair business or because the cost of repair by specialists is prohibitive. Once there were many small family repair businesses located in the suburbs of our cities but they are harder to find these days. Without adequate 'Right to Repair' policies Australia will see more small businesses which employ local people in their communities being forced to close. The prohibitive expense of repair is often the result of the product's manufacturer creating barriers for the local repair specialist businesses and can involve the need to send an item for assessment, perhaps overseas, with no guarantee that it will be repaired. If an item cannot be fixed during a Repair Café session the owner will always be encouraged to seek out professional help. Many participants report that prior to discovering the existence of our Repair Café they would normally throw away broken items because it was too costly or difficult to do anything else. As stated earlier one of the aims of Repair Cafes is to encourage a culture of repair and waste reduction.

We have held nine Repair Café Hobart sessions since we opened on October 19 2019 (we ceased operating for much of 2020 due to Covid 19). Of the many and varied items which were brought in to be repaired e.g. clothing, furniture jewellery, toys, electrical goods and crockery: 66% were repaired, 25% were 'partially' repaired and 9% of items were unable to be repaired. It is notable that 77% of the unrepairable items were electrical. The following are comments made by our electrical fixer volunteers on the repair sheets of unrepairable items:

"Sealed unit" "Unfixable (financially unviable to repair)" "Appropriate tool unavailable"

The inadequacies of The *Competition and Consumer Act 2010* (CCA) deny consumers choice, limit employment opportunities for repair businesses and stifle innovation. Emphasising 'intellectual property' rights as an argument against access to products to enable repair stifles possibilities for inventiveness and innovation which is not in the best interest of the Australian community into the future. This position will only benefit large manufacturers who are often majority overseas owned companies. As we have learned during the Covid 19 pandemic it is unwise to be too heavily reliant on overseas manufacturing. We strongly recommend that new policies and strong legislation be developed to support the 'Right to Repair' in Australia.