

SPACE

Sunday 5th June 2016

To the Productivity Commission Inquiry,

Space Furniture has represented and supported original design in Australia for more than 20 years by selling furniture and related design products through our showrooms in Brisbane, Melbourne and Sydney. We currently employ around 100 staff throughout our Australian operations.

We would like to see changes made to the protection of designs which have more relevance to the efforts of designers, and demonstrate a respect in Australia for original thought, ideas, innovation and creativity.

We are educated through our entire schooling that copying is cheating and unacceptable, so why should our view or moral judgement be any different in regards to the protection of original design?

The argument has been raised that;

'High-end products and their lower cost imitations target different types of consumers, so that substitution from a high quality product to low quality product with a similar design would be low'.

(ADA Australian Design Alliance – Policy Brief Summary May 2016)

This alludes to the fact that fundamentally it is acceptable to source or manufacture a copy of an original design and take it to market simply because there is a potential demand for it. This misses the point of why we should be protecting intellectual property.

If copies were not available in the market, customers would either, purchase the original product and support the welfare of the original designer or else purchase an *alternative* lower cost product which itself was an original design.

Copies are almost always inferior in terms of production and their availability and exposure have a detrimental effect on the reputation of the original design in the market place. The original design often becomes associated with the copies and as a consequence the original design is no longer specified in projects or homes as customers do not want the association with inferior copied products.

As a business we have recently expanded our business and launched a new brand, SP01. The evolution and strategy direction of this business has been influenced by the scale of furniture copies in the Australian market place.

One of the key strategies with our new brand is to focus our efforts in the European markets where we know our designs will be protected and where the sales opportunities will not be diminished by companies selling copies of our products. For this reason we are manufacturing our products in Italy which can be seen as a lost opportunity for Australian manufacturing and job opportunities for Australians.

Australia, due to its relatively small population is already a challenging market, so when original designs are competing directly with copies it discourages new businesses from entering the market and representing and promoting original design.

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I was born in the UK and having studied design there, spent the first few years of my working life in the furniture industry in London. I have now been in Australia for the past 14 years and as an Australian citizen have been increasingly alarmed by the dramatic increase in the availability and acceptance of copies in the same industry.

In the UK, with recent changes to design protection it has been evident that the value of original design and its protection are an important aspect of a respectful and progressive society.

I believe it is the right time for Australia to demonstrate a similar level of respect and support original design by changing policy regarding Intellectual Property. It is imperative to do this to ensure we encourage the creative pursuits of individuals and to foster a culture innovation and progress within our country.

I would welcome anyone to contact me if I can give any further information or can assist further in defining this policy.

Kind regards,

Jon Holland
Victoria State Manager

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