510. M Ansara

Dear Friends,

Below is my submission to the copyright and digital economy review:

I have been a casual university lecturer from time to time and in that capacity participated in the monitoring for copyright purposes of articles I have used in teaching. These articles were reproduced from the internet and from printed publications.

Primarily, however, I have worked as a writer and film director/producer. And in this capacity, I contribute to Australian screen culture not only by making films  but also by writing articles which are published for free or for a very small payment. In an unpaid capacity I have also written a number of articles for books published by academics who are on salary while I have only ever been on short contracts and that not often. I am the author of two books for which I received no payment for their publication despite their excellent reception and reasonable sales.  My films, which have been purchased by public television at very low rates and for which I received low wages in their production, have been copied off air and retransmitted many times.

I am now an aged pensioner, but even before retirement the money that came to me from educational use/retransmission via the Copyright Agency for my writing and Screenrights for my films has not only been an essential part of my financial survival, but an encouragement to continue thinking and continue engaging with ideas and public debate through writing and filmmaking activities.

Looking at the current collecting system from the point of view of someone who has copied and shared content as well as someone who depends on payments from it, I find it a fair and beneficial system, easy to use and no problem whatsoever. I can't, of course, get money for every instance of copying of my material, but the way the money is allocated makes sense and I think is fair enough.

I cannot understand why there should be any move to change a system that works or to remove the rights of those of us who (at least in my case) spend a lot of unpaid time and effort on our work. Indeed, if I were find my material copied without the protection of the current copyright legislation I would, on principle, do everything I could to challenge such a violation of my rights over my work. I have already done so twice with the unauthorised use of my film material and been well paid for my efforts.

Having said this, I have often given permission for the free use of my material when it has seemed appropriate. But the decision to do so is mine.

If you are not a freelance writer or filmmaker you might have trouble understanding the principle and feeling involved, but for those of you who own a house and land, think of it this way: suppose people decided that they wanted to share your property, have a party there and invite others in for a few drinks, without permission and without any chance of payment, or perhaps hold seminars in your lounge room on worthy educational issues, how would you see that? Would you still think that your property should be yours but mine should be shared with others for free?

In an ideal society, where writers and filmmakers are on an adequate salary (the way lawyers and academics are), I would agree that "property is theft" and our creative endeavours should be shared freely. But today in Australia, it is crystal clear that this is not the case. I am immensely grateful for the payments I receive via CAL and Screenrights and I don't see any evidence that I am being selfish or restrictive in wanting to continue with the system that gives me this little bit of survival. It works well and we have had a digital environment for some time now.

Thanks for your consideration,

Martha Ansara