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Lesson from Canada's copyright blunder

Thank goodness for the Australian Association for the Teaching of English and its logical, progressive view on strong copyright law ("Copyright changes are risky, say English teachers" July 7).

In Canada, most educational groups succumbed to the siren call of weakened copyright sung by self-serving techno-utopian voices like Wikipedia, Google and the Electronic Frontier Foundation, and our government gutted the law.

Now Canadian educators regularly find themselves in court unprotected by institutional licences, student costs have risen sharply, there is less domestic material for teaching, homegrown writers' incomes have collapsed and the domestic publishing industry is in crisis.

Australia should learn from the example of Canada's terrible mistake. The only winners with weakened copyright and expanded "fair use" are the wealthy offshore technology firms with business models built on access to masses of free content. Everyone else ends up poorer and with fewer rights.

The argument that copyright somehow gets in the way of access is completely disingenuous. Copyright is about encouraging respectful, fair and sustainable access to cultural products. Those arguing otherwise simply want someone else to pay the bill.

John Degen, Canadian author, chairman of the International Authors Forum