

# A Modest Proposal

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*April 1979*

*This article followed a report from The Editors in Sydney that proposed cooperation with the Society of Editors.*

I'm sure the two societies will find lots to do in common, and I am excited at the thought that this may be the beginning of a relationship that will be of tremendous benefit to the editorial profession in particular, and publishing in general, in Australia.

I am also concerned at the thought that it may not. Sydney and Melbourne have a consistent history, in just about any activity you care to name, of mutual jealousy and mistrust. How do we avoid the unhappy division that has afflicted so many?

For a start, I want to make a plea to The Editors to change their name. We need to speak with one voice and be known by one name: The Society of Editors. Call yourselves 'The Society of Editors (NSW)'. And we in Melbourne should call ourselves The Society of Editors (Victoria).

I can't see why there should not be a Society of Editors in each capital city – even if its activities amount to not much more than half a dozen people getting together for dinner each month. People in Adelaide, from Rigby's, tell me that this would be dead boring because they would only be meeting the same people from the office that they meet each day. I think that's incorrect. There are freelancers in Adelaide and, believe it or not, there are other publishers in Adelaide. There seem to be enough people in publishing in Brisbane and Perth to form societies, and I shall be just a little disappointed if Ann Lahey doesn't do something about getting those hordes of editors in Canberra together. Even in Hobart there are editors and publishers, and despite Tasmania's reputation for everyone knowing everyone else, I'll bet they don't.

Are you familiar with the history of the National Trust of Australia? Strictly speaking, there's no such thing. The Trust started in Sydney, and was in the doldrums a bit when an entirely separate body, the National Trust of South Australia, was formed. Then Trusts were formed in the other states, each with its own kind of organisation and relationship with state government. It took a lot of effort to get them together in a council of National Trusts, and for a while it looked as though South Australia wouldn't join. That sort of needless disunity could easily develop among Australian editors and their organisations. I would hate to see it happen.

I'm talking to The Editors – and the Society of Editors and the Imprint Society and the Galley Club and everyone – on the same subject. And the subject is the need for editors to get to know each other, first; and second, the need for editors to be clearly identifiable as a body of professional people.

If this sounds like an attempt to form a trade union, dispel the thought. We already have one. It is called the Australian Journalists' Association. You should be a member, but don't have to be. The AJA is the first body that needs to be impressed by a clearly identifiable body of professional editors.

If the nature of what I am suggesting is not too clear, think about the engineering profession. Engineers (those with certain professional qualifications: let's not cloud the matter) have a professional association called the Institution of Engineers, Australia; and they have an industrial association (to which they are not obliged to belong) called the Association of Professional Engineers, Australia. Our industrial association, our union, is the AJA. The professional body I

want to see would be our parallel with the I.E.Aust. – and I am suggesting that it be called the Society of Editors.

The detail (there'll be plenty of it), the form of affiliation and so on, I don't propose to comment on here, beyond commenting that the time for arranging the detail is now, at the beginning. Remember the National Trust. Let there be diversity, but let it be diversity within unity.