

30 June 1999 HANSARD

National Library---Book Sales

12. MARIAN HOBBS (NZ Labour) to the Minister of Education: Did he give his consent to the sale of almost 32,000 books from the general collection of the National Library to a secondhand dealer; if so, why?

Hon. NICK SMITH (Minister of Education): No specific consent was given by me. Decisions about the library's book collection are made by staff on the basis of the library's collection policy, which was developed after extensive consultation in 1996. The 32,000 books at issue are all older than 20 years. None has been used more than once---[Interruption] I raise a point of order, Mr Speaker. I was attempting to answer the member's question and I had not completed it when a barrage of abuse came from the Opposition benches, and I would like the opportunity to answer the question in full.

Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER: I apologise to the honourable member. My attention was distracted at the time. I invite him to give his answer, which will be heard in silence.

Hon. NICK SMITH: The 32,000 books at issue are all older than 20 years. None has been used more than once in 10 years, and none is a New Zealand original. The House should note that the library has a total collection of over 1.5 million books, and it acquires over 60,000 additional items each year. It is sensible management of the library to review its collection regularly, as it has done every year in the last 10 years, to ensure the materials it has are those that are of most value to its users.

Marian Hobbs: Is the Minister aware of the assurances made by the National Librarian, Christopher Blake, quoting the National Library Act, that: "The National Library cannot dispose of any of its collections without the consent of the Minister on the advice of the trustees."; and if, as the Minister says, he did not give his consent to the sale of the 32,000 books, will he ask for such dispersal of a wide range of books and music scores to be halted immediately until the law is complied with?

Hon. NICK SMITH: The idea that the law states that every---

Marian Hobbs: Read the Act.

Hon. NICK SMITH: I am very aware of the Act. The Act does not require the Minister to approve individually every one of the 32,000 books, out of 1.5 million, that have not been used once in 10 years. What the Act requires is that if the Minister wishes to have a removal of an entire collection then that must have the Minister's approval. I refer the member to---[Interruption]

Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER: I am sorry to interrupt Dr Smith. The member has asked two questions. For heaven's sake! Let the Minister answer them without constant interjection.

Hon. NICK SMITH: I refer the member to the collections policy that was approved in 1996 that requires an ongoing review of all collections within the library to ensure they remain up to date and relevant for a modern national library.

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Tony Steel: Is it intended that the National Library sell off any of the Alexander Turnbull Library collection?

Hon. NICK SMITH: Absolutely not. Those collections cannot be sold and are protected as part of New Zealand's heritage.