

19 December 2008

Productivity Commission,  
GPO Box 1428  
Canberra City 2601

Dear Productivity Commission,

**AUTHOR SUBMISSION: PARALLEL IMPORTATION OF BOOKS**

I am a full-time, professional novelist, the author of over 40 books. All were first published in Australia and many are published overseas – in English and in various European languages. My books have been on best-seller lists in Germany (where I have won awards, made author tours and attended literary festivals) and best-books-of-the-year lists in the USA.

I can confidently state that I owe this international success to the fact that I was first published in Australia and then vigorously brought to the attention of overseas publishers by my agent and publishers in Australia. If changes are made to the current restrictions on the parallel importation of books, my livelihood – and that of others like me – will suffer greatly. I will no longer be protected in my own market – unlike my American and English peers.

Three areas concern me:

***The role of booksellers***

I don't think we can rely on booksellers to value and protect Australian writers and publishers or indeed Australian culture. The catalogues regularly released by the chains and the independents always give prominence to blockbuster titles from England and the USA over Australian titles. The latest Dymocks Christmas catalogue lists only one Australian crime title, for example, and five general fiction titles. I have seen catalogues in recent years that list *no* Australian titles.

If the restrictions are lifted, I foresee the following happening. First, booksellers will bring in a flood of cheap imports, which will nudge Australian books off the shelf.

Second, booksellers will become even less likely to promote and nurture Australian books, which will mean a loss of income for Australian authors and independent Australian publishers. Third, Australian culture will suffer (see below). Fourth, booksellers are not likely to know about, seek out and import titles from small overseas companies (I'm published by Soho in New York) – they'll import from the big multinationals like HarperCollins.

### *The effect on local publishers*

I'm lucky enough to be published by a vigorous and successful independent company, Text Publishing. They have made a significant investment in me (a writing career should be seen in the long term – we might not find a readership until our third, seventh, tenth book, over three, seven, ten years).

But will our publishers continue to invest in us if that investment isn't protected? If the current restrictions on parallel importation are lifted, it's likely that Australian publishers will cease publishing local literature in favour of the type of Australian book that an overseas publisher won't want (coffee table books on woolsheds, for example), many will close up shop, and the Australian offshoots of multinational publishers will merely be distributors of books for the parent company (there are already signs that this is happening).

### *The effects on our culture*

In setting up the terms of reference for the inquiry, the Assistant Treasurer and Minister for Competition Policy and Consumer Affairs, Chris Bowen, said: "Any policy reforms in this area will be aimed at enhancing Australia's longer term growth prospects".

It distresses me greatly that the Productivity Commission under a Labor government is concerned only about the economic ramifications and not also the cultural.

As stated above, booksellers don't seem to value the local product. Perhaps a cultural cringe is operating – booksellers believe that Australian books and authors couldn't possibly be as good as those from overseas. Or the multi-national publishers have the clout to influence the marketing of books in bookshops (catalogue advertising;

shopfloor displays, etc). Or readers want overseas, not Australian, books. No matter the reason, it's vital that we nurture Australian writers and writing and *Australian readers of Australian writing*. The current Irish bestseller list is 70% Irish titles – because readers and booksellers value Irish writers. If the restrictions are lifted then the inroads of cheap mass culture from overseas (mainly the United States) will become more pronounced. There will be no more of the kinds of greatly loved and deeply enriching local titles that encourage us to reflect on who we are and where we're going. The Prime Minister has said that he wants cultural production to increase, but that's unlikely if we're flooded with cheap imports.

Yours sincerely,

Garry Disher