

Productivity Commission Submission

Parallel Importation of Books

Dear Mr Woods and Ms Sylvan

When I was growing up, reading was one of my favourite past times, and still is. Unfortunately, amongst all the *Famous Five*, *Nancy Drew*, *Hardy Boys*, *Little House on the Prairie* and *Black Beauty* reading fodder, a couple of Colin Thiele books are the only Australian stories I can recall reading.

Fast forward to 2009 and it is heartening indeed to see that my children's bookcase is stocked predominately by Australian authors. It is no co-incidence that they spell the word colour without ever wondering if the 'u' really belongs there – unlike their mother.

The strength and quality of publishing in Australia, particularly over the past ten – fifteen years, is something we should be proud of and continue to nurture, not something we should put at risk by allowing the Parallel importation of books.

The key argument that it would open the way for cheaper books being available to the public is fraught with suppositions. Ultimately, booksellers will price books according to what the public is willing to pay, and their profit margins will always, and understandably, be their first priority. New Zealand removed the restrictions on parallel importation in 1998 but books today are just as expensive as they were prior to the removal of the restrictions.

While I would like to see the price of books in this country reduced, perhaps by GST exemption, it is interesting to note that many discount variety stores already sell books for less than the publisher's RRP, and an average \$22 book equates to just 2% of the average Australian weekly wage.

The fact that subsidies for book creators are even mentioned in the issues paper suggests a general acceptance that changes to our territorial copyright would indeed be detrimental to that sector. Even if the (always publically unpopular) subsidies were made available, they could only ever support those already in the industry – there is nothing to compensate those writers who still aspire to be published. A dream which will be considerably harder should Australian publishers find it too much of a financial risk to take a chance on a new writer.

We need exactly what we have now, a thriving publishing industry supplying a diverse range of books to readers, and continually finding new talent. This will ensure that my grandchildren's bookcase won't only contain stories about American kids spreading 'jelly' on toast, or even worse, UK stories, where the Poms retaining the Ashes has become the norm.

Please, our book industry ain't broke – don't fix it.

Kind regards

Trudie Trewin