

11 January 2009

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**Submission to the Productivity Commission on
Copyright Restrictions on the Parallel Importation of Books**

I write as a debut author (my first novel, *Cooee*, was published by Scribe in November last year). My submission therefore has the disadvantage of inexperience and the virtue of freshness: I carry no baggage to this debate. I write because I now feel implicated in these issues: I am delighted and excited to have been published, and I hope to pursue a career as an author. It appears to me, however, that the conditions resulting from the lifting of parallel importation restrictions (PIR) would make such an ambition more difficult to achieve.

I should like to make four points in particular.

Why put ourselves at a disadvantage?

I do not see why we might propose to drop a policy which has served Australian authors and publishers so well, and which has clearly also generated success and prosperity in the bookselling industries of the UK, the USA, and Canada. Would not a reversion of the current provisions present companies in these countries with significant advantages over those in Australia? Would not limitations apply to Australian companies that would not apply to overseas ones in direct competition? It seems perverse to put ourselves at a competitive disadvantage in an international market. If the abolition of PIR is so desirable, why isn't everybody doing it? I should think foreign companies must be hugging themselves in anticipatory joy at the thought of the great dumping ground we might soon make legitimately available to them.

Why imperil a healthy sector of the economy?

I note and applaud the Commission's assertion that it "interprets 'benefits' and 'costs' in their fullest sense", and I understand that this is therefore not an inquiry that limits itself to economic aspects. If the inquiry were so limited, however, it would survey a vibrant and robust industry, efficient, valuable, and still developing despite an uncertain environment. The book industry does not produce carbon emissions like coal; it does not endanger health like tobacco; it is not losing its market like car manufacture; it has not gone bankrupt like childcare; it does not rely on a dwindling market like mining. The list of faltering enterprises continues: for instance, tourism,

international tertiary students, wine, films. I do not see why, in the present economic climate, one would alter the regulations underpinning an independent and thriving industry.

Why dilute the culture?

Culture is dynamic, vulnerable, permeable. It is not static: it can be diluted or enriched. Events (migrations, wars, elections, even books) change countries and cultures and there is no point in trying to impose artificial and over-protective measures for preservation. But there is a point in trying not to weaken what is good and individual and significant about one's national culture, rather than permitting it to be swamped with alien products and influences.

Why weaken the relationship between writer and publisher?

The Issues Paper asks:

... to what extent is it important for Australian authors to have access to an Australian publisher in order to develop and promote their works? To what extent is access to an Australian publisher more important for a debut author than for one with a track record?

For me, as a debut author, it would be hard adequately to express the degree of my reliance on my publisher, or the importance of easy access to my editor. The relationship is crucial and its success depends partly on sheer proximity, as well as shared cultural and linguistic understanding.

As Michael Heyward has said, copyright is 'all a writer has to sell'. I am deeply concerned by the prospect of any diminishment of its integrity; and such a diminishment seems an inevitable outcome of the proposed changes.

I am grateful to the Productivity Commission for the opportunity to contribute my views to this debate.

Vivienne Kelly