

Productivity submission

15-01-09

To: The Productivity Commissioners

My name is Libby Gleeson AM and I have been a published author since 1984. My work is written for children, young adults and adults and much of it has also been published in the UK, the USA, France, Germany, Italy, Denmark, Korea and Colombia. In the latter case, the books are also distributed through Spanish speaking South America.

I am extremely concerned at the possible abandonment of Australian Territorial Copyright.

Under the current system we have a vibrant national publishing industry and that means a rich literary culture. In the area where I am most published, children's fiction, we have moved from a situation where Australian children were raised on a diet of Enid Blyton, Biggles and the Bobbsey Twins to a situation where now they read widely: Paul Jennings, Morris Gleitzman, Jackie French, Margaret Wild, Bob Graham, Carole Wilkinson, Shaun Tan and many, many more. Our own culture – rural, urban, Indigenous and multicultural is there in the literature that our young people are exposed to. Of course they also read material from other parts of the world, produced in countries that have their own systems of territorial copyright.

If copyright were to be deregulated I would lose the ability to negotiate with separate publishing houses around the world for the licensing of my work. My Australian publishers could not compete with the editions produced by an overseas publisher and would probably not take the risk on production of my work here. These overseas editions would deliver me a reduced overseas royalty and any number dumped here onto the Australian market would deliver me no royalty at all. My income and that of the many writers who now enjoy flourishing careers would be compromised or would disappear.

Even more importantly new young writers would not be published. The local industry would not be sufficiently well resourced to take a risk on an unknown writer.

I am at a loss to understand why this issue has been raised. The question over the pricing of books is a furphy. The only letters to the paper that I have seen suggesting that books are too expensive have come from Don Grover of Dymocks Books and Bob Carr, former premier of NSW and currently a board director of Dymocks. Is this a conspiracy on behalf of this large book chain?

The largest book industries in the English speaking world are The United States of America and Great Britain. Their writers and publishers enjoy the cultural and economic protection that territorial copyright provides. The stability of their professional lives and their incomes is protected by copyright restrictions. Australian writers and publishers and others in the industry deserve as much.

New Zealand has abandoned that protection and it is my understanding that the number of locally produced book titles has declined significantly and there has been no decline in the price of books.

I urge the Commissioners to consider the literary culture of the Australian community and not abandon writers, illustrators, editors, publishers, printers and booksellers.

Respectfully yours,

Libby Gleeson AM