

Submission to Productivity Commission

I am writing to express my opposition to the possibility of changes to the current parallel importation and territorial copyright rules in Australia.

As a full-time writer with eight works of fiction published in Australia and internationally in the past eight years, I believe changes would seriously damage the Australian publishing industry. I also believe they would have an enormously harmful cultural impact, curtailing the emergence of new Australian writing talent and reducing opportunities for Australians to read books that reflect and explore the place they live and the lives they lead.

Australian publishers have warned of the economic consequences to the industry of allowing a flood of US and UK-published books into the country. I agree with them that the creation of an open market would not automatically lead to cheaper books. From an author's point of view, my other concern is the possibility of foreign copies entering the market without the benefit of marketing or promotional support. More importantly for an author's livelihood, reduced or no royalties would be paid on these copies.

Without a strong local publishing industry, Australian writers' chances of getting published, both locally and internationally, are severely diminished. In the case of my own career, publishers in London, New York and in countries such as Germany, Italy, the Netherlands and Norway became interested in my books only after I had been published successfully in Australia (by Penguin). I have no doubt that a New York or London-based publisher would have had little interest in an unproven Australian author.

Australian publishers can – and do – nurture and support Australian writing talent in a unique way. Over the past 18 years, the 30/90 rule regarding parallel importation and the Copyright Act has helped to create a vibrant local publishing industry. Publishers have been able to seek out new talent and build their existing authors' readerships secure in the knowledge that their copyright was safe. If Australia becomes an open market, I believe

this would change. Australian authors such as myself with international readerships could find themselves with no choice but to sign directly with US and UK publishers, and see their books exported into Australia as foreign editions, with foreign covers and in the case of American editions, foreign spelling and vocabulary. Apart from the negative cultural implications, these imports would mean less Australian involvement in editing, printing, design, production and marketing. Over time, there would surely be a sizeable impact on employment levels in the Australian publishing industry.

Aside from the financial implications for myself and the industry, I also have strong concerns for our cultural identity. In 2006, I was honoured to be selected as ambassador for the Federal Government-funded *Books Alive* campaign. The initiative aims to encourage Australians to read more books, with the emphasis on Australian titles and authors. My role as ambassador was to spend five weeks touring the country, speaking to booksellers, librarians, teachers and readers of all ages and backgrounds, in cities, country towns and outback areas. Again and again people told me how much it meant to them to read about Australia in novels as well as works of non-fiction.

While I am currently based in Ireland for family reasons (my husband is Irish), I am and always will be an Australian writer. My own novels always feature Australian settings, characters, vocabulary and stories, and it is a matter of great pride to me that they have found their way into other countries and languages. In an era when the world is becoming homogenised, shouldn't we as Australians be searching for ways to nurture and promote our unique character and culture?

If the Productivity Commission is truly and solely concerned with the price of books, could it investigate the removal of GST on books sold in Australia? That would immediately reduce the price and make books more affordable.

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