

Dear Productivity Commission

Several of my author colleagues have explained to you in measured, thoughtful, irrefutable terms why removing Australian territorial copyright would not benefit the Australian community, and they also speak for me.

I would like to add a more personal response.

In a warehouse on the outskirts of a large American city are many thousands of my books. This is not unusual. The vagaries of the US publishing, marketing, retail, educational and bookclub worlds mean that even successful titles often have significant surplus stocks. These books of mine are owned by a remainder wholesaler, who paid an American publisher less than a dollar each for them. I'm not well-known in the US, so their retail value in the US is not huge. If they could be sold in Australia, however, the wholesaler would clean up.

As would the booksellers who bought them. They would have cut-price copies of two of my titles, known and read by children in every school in Australia. They could sell them at less than normal retail price, undercutting their competitors and still enjoying their normal profit margin. I would not enjoy my normal profit margin because I would not get a cent from any of those books. Neither would the Australian publisher whose investment funded the creation of these titles and who therefore has an exclusive licence to sell them in Australia in the hope of recouping that investment.

But the booksellers would be happy. Book buyers would be happy. The government could bask in the glow of having saved voters money. For a short while. Less than an average election cycle, probably. Then the true cost would start to reveal itself.

I would have moved to Britain and would be writing books for British children and paying tax to the British government. My annual tax bill probably isn't much less than the total amount that would be saved by the Australian public in a typical year's dumping of my US-remaindered titles. In other words, Australian taxpayers would be paying for their own lower prices.

My unwilling relocation would have come about because my Australian publisher would no longer be able to provide me with an income. Unable to publish any book either derived from an overseas edition or deserving of one without risking commercial ruin, Australian publishers would be producing mostly street directories.

Why would a devoted and successful provider of Australian stories for Australian children abandon his beloved readers? Because Australian kids' authors need

publishers and editors and illustrators and designers who understand the thoughts and feelings of Australian kids. And those members of the Australian workforce would be looking for other jobs. UK publishing teams understand UK kids, and that's what I would have to learn to do.

Of course my personal cultural tragedy would amount to very little in the larger hill of beans, except that I wouldn't be alone. I'd be a member of an extinct species. Successful Australian authors of all types would have sought refuge in those English-speaking countries (the majority) who understand that territorial copyright allows them to have a literary culture. Those authors whose passports or consciences prevented them from relocating would take Centrelink-funded early retirement and spend sad hours explaining to talented young Australian writers why they can't have a turn.

And future generations of Australian kids, on hearing we once had Australian stories written by Australian authors, would wonder what the government could have been thinking back then. A few would get angry, but most, never having read stories that champion our tradition of determined indignant optimism, would shrug and say, 'aw shucks, I guess that's how the goddam cookie crumbles.'

I'm an author, so I can't resist throwing in a metaphor. There are tragic illnesses of the human body that involve the immune system attacking itself. A healthy culture needs an immune system, and territorial copyright is a crucial part of that.

I can't fully articulate the distress I would feel at seeing my own books being used to destroy my own culture, so please don't let it happen.

Morris Gleitzman

17 January 2009