

Saving the Australian Story

Submission to the review of Copyright Restrictions on the Parallel Importation of Books

by Sid Sidebottom MP

Maintaining Australia's innovative copyright laws is much more than just a bureaucratic or technical move, it is about saving the Australian Story and preventing us becoming a global mono-culture. It is about choice – nurturing, sustaining and preserving the local and having access to global selection.

As a keen reader, particularly of Australian history, I believe that we must do everything possible to promote and strengthen the local industry and allow it to be internationally competitive, and to seek to avoid the continued cultural diminution which we are forced to confront from so many areas.

The **'thirty day rule'** helps to encourage the publication of works in Australia, forcing publishers to proceed with works or see them imported from other international sources. This supports local publishing by keeping local printing infrastructure active and vibrant, within a reasonable time limit.

This strong local industry allows Australian publishers to invest in local authors, who would otherwise be faced with the daunting task of self-publishing or dealing with international companies if they were able to convince them that their work is worthy. Literally, closer proximity of relationship between author and publisher is an important stimulus for emerging local authors.

My research reveals that today about 64 per cent of books sold in Australia are published locally, a vast difference to the film and music industries.

The **'thirty day rule'** has a similar effect to the territorial copyright which exists in the US and UK, and its removal could see Australia become a dumping ground for overruns in other countries.

I believe there is little- to- no evidence from other countries to show that removal of these copyright measures leads to lower prices for books – a perennial argument used by deregulators across many fronts of industry - but only serves to increase the profits for the international publishers and importers of the books.

Supporters of an unregulated approach claim the change would lead to a reduction in the price of books, but I understand this has not been the case in the New Zealand market for example.

They argue that copyright holders could still use contractual arrangements to control imports, but realistically, what power would a young or emerging author have when trying to break into the world of publishing? In many instances these authors would be forced to take what comes, and be left with little chance to establish their local stories but to conform to whatever will appeal to the global market we will be left with.

In a more localised way, the impact any decline in Australian publishing may have in my own area could be significant. Tasmania's North-West, which I proudly represent, includes two major operations belonging to Australian Paper, at Burnie and Wesley Vale. They produce papers for book printers and are significant employers in the region, and on a state-wide scale. A reduced demand for their products could have considerable negative consequences. Therefore, providing a strong and robust Australian publishing sector seems the best way to ensure ongoing viability.

I am also aware of the many locally produced publications, which are important in maintaining both the local skills and expertise and jobs of those in the industry. The region has a number of experienced and long-serving printing and publishing operations. A decline may also impact on their future.

My home state has a rich and long-running history in the literary field, with a number of nationally and internationally acclaimed authors having emerged in Tasmania, or eventually calling our island home. To fail to protect them and their colleagues around the country would be a betrayal of their obvious talent and contribution to Australian culture.

I am sure these consequences would be replicated across the country, and would risk a swift decline in Australia's publishing industry.

I submit that the current strength of Australia's billion dollar publishing industry, the variety of works published locally, and continuing emergence of world class authors, is all the evidence required to support the retention of the current system – a system that supports choice yet nurtures local talent and jobs.

Until we see a change in other major markets such as the U.S. and U.K., we should carefully guard the local industry and become champions of the Australian Story!

Should you require any further information in relation to this submission, please don't hesitate to contact me.

Best wishes in your deliberations.

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