

RESPONSE – PARALLEL IMPORTATION OF BOOKS

I am not a published author, but an ordinary Australian who buys books, mostly non-fiction. I appreciate being able to include among my purchases a significant percentage of Australian books, chosen from a diverse range.

In particular, I would like to be confident that all those involved in producing a book know the society from the inside out, and can freely and without censorship deal with topics relating to Australia, including its relationship with the rest of the world.

My income is such that book buying is something I have to factor into my budget. However I do not find books expensive. The pricing of books is comparable to the ticket cost of other leisure time activities, such as going to the theatre or a concert, or a reasonably significant sporting event. Australia is a small market, and may not be able to have the economies of scale enjoyed by countries with larger populations. I don't mind paying extra to have my culture discussed and reflected upon by people who know it.

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In considering the cultural objectives that might be achieved by Australian stories, the Commission is also interested in any views on the importance of the medium for securing those cultural benefits. Australian culture, expressed through Australian stories, can be disseminated in any number of ways — through television and radio, production of Australian films, visual creations such as paintings and sculpture, and live performances of music and theatre, as well as through books. In this context, the Australian, state and territory governments provide cultural funding across all creative mediums.

How do cultural benefits generated by books differ from those from other forms of cultural creation or expression? Are there reasons for government policies and/or funding of cultural outcomes to favour books over other forms of artistic or cultural creation or expression, or vice versa?

My response to the above is as follows:

A book is a robust thing. It lasts a good many years, and can travel to you, and with you. A copy of a published item is the 'original' enjoyed by any person anywhere, equally, without disadvantage. A book is something that can be picked up when the reader decides, not according to someone else's timetable.

A performance is an ephemeral thing. In the case of a live performance, the audience has to travel it, and that may add a great deal to the cost. It may be almost impossible for some people who live away from large capital cities to attend performances. It is true that regional Australia does enjoy some performances by visiting artists, however how comprehensively and frequently? Radio and television performances are also ephemeral, and does all of Australia have equal access to these transmissions?

Does all of Australia have continual access to comprehensive, good quality visual art collections / installation venues?

How does the totality of choice of performance / broadcast / exhibited material compare with that of reading material available at a given time?

Reading is a different cultural experience from that derived from the performing or visual arts. Someone who finds solace or stimulation in the pages of book may not necessarily have the literacy, or interest, in the other art forms to gain the same depth of experience.

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