

19th January 2009

Dear Commission Members,

I write on behalf of the 'Public Libraries, New South Wales – Country Association', which represents the Country Public Libraries of NSW.

Libraries in NSW lend over 48,500,000 books each year, and nearly 50% of the State's population are registered as library members. NSW public libraries buy very large numbers of Australian titles. They are able to do so because the Australian publishing industry is currently thriving. PLNSW-Country believes that the current 'Copyright Restrictions on the Parallel Importation of Books into Australia' is the key reason that the Australian Publishing industry is, thankfully, performing well. Australian authors are appropriately protected by the restrictions, while at the same time the interest of the book reading public is safeguarded adequately by the 30/90 day rule. Furthermore, individuals are not restricted from buying books from abroad via the internet.

In particular I would point out that, with a total population of app 21 million, half of whom are regular book readers, there is a relatively small market for the publishing industry. Apart from the top ten best selling authors, the average Australian author struggles to survive, and little-known, or newly emerging Australian authors find it hard to have books published.

Removing importation restrictions would immediately threaten all Australian publishers, some would close, and the avenue for new authors would be even further limited. The large international publishers will have no interest in producing Australian books which may have limited international, mass-market appeal.

PLNSW-Country believes that removing the current safeguards would ultimately lead to a serious decline in the number and range of Australian books produced.

Australian authors have a unique voice, which we should be able to hear. Arriving in Australia over 40 years ago from England, Australian novels gave me, and still give me an immediate insight into my new country. For years I read nothing but Australian novels. Immigrants need the opportunity to discover and understand their new country, and Australian books provide one important opportunity to do so. 'Culture', unfortunately seems to be an increasingly devalued concept, but Australian books help to keep Australia's cultural identity alive and well. Books are not just a commodity like canned beans or shoes.

The suggestion that an 'open market' would result in cheaper books can not be, and has not been demonstrated. What is more likely is that the very large international publishers will increase their profits, and some books may be \$1 or \$2 cheaper. But what is certain is that Australia would become a dumping ground for cheap remainders – some of which would be by Australian authors whose books had not sold in Boston or Pittsburgh, casually dumped here at cheap prices. These would compete with current Australian publishers books, and the result would be Australian authors works (paying a much smaller, or no royalty) undercutting both our authors and their publishers.. Perhaps, in the very short term the public would benefit, but not for long, as both Australian authors and publishers faded out.

I would also point out that the public already have access to cheap books. Every week major retailers offer large discounts on current bestsellers, and individuals can buy books from anywhere via the internet. But for the serious book reader there are still small but just viable bookshops which offer a wider and more specialised range of titles.

There have been very many enquiries into the importation of books, fortunately all have found that books do represent a special case, and that restrictions on importation are in the best interests of the public. PLNSW-C believes that this is still the case and urges the Commission to retain the current safeguards, in the interest of the public and the Australian book trade.

Yours faithfully,

Martin Field
Secretary/Treasurer,
Public Libraries NSW – Country.