

19 January 2009

Dear Productivity Commissioners:

I am an established author of five Australian novels, only one of which has been published overseas. My submission is based on wide reading and discussion on both sides of parallel importation issue and after lengthy consideration I believe it would be a retrograde step, with serious consequences for the industry overall as well as for writers like myself.

It is fairly certain that effectively dismantling current Australian copyright arrangements at a time of a severe global economic downturn will not only have grave consequences for publishing in this country, but would fly in the face of the government's current priority of saving Australian jobs.

The last four decades have seen unprecedented growth in Australian publishing, due in large part to the English-language copyright regime finessed since the Second World War. The book industry provides employment for authors, agents, editors, public relations and marketing personnel, illustrators, typesetters, printers, manuscript assessors and sales representatives. Recent growth in tertiary level writing courses and literary festivals is also attributable to the industry, and these in turn provide employment for numerous academics and professionals. Additionally, the industry encourages related employment for reviewers and literary journalists in print, broadcast and digital media.

All told, these professionals constitute an important segment of the skilled labour market. They also make an incalculable contribution to the nation's cultural life, not only by the books they produce, distribute, read, teach and discuss, but also by stimulating cultural production in other fields that draw on our literature for ideas, stories and source material.

At least five previous inquiries have been held on this issue, instigated by booksellers and a small group of consumers arguing that opening the market without restriction for overseas-generated books would lower prices. This argument is questionable.

Taking into account exchange rates, freight costs, and the intricacy of pricing in the industry both here and overseas, it is doubtful if any appreciable difference in price would be the outcome. What is certain is that a significant number of Australian publishers could go out of business, taking with them much of the employment referred to. Others would be forced to cut their publication lists, again with severe repercussions on employment and the subsequent loss of skills.

There is even less reason today, given the current economic crisis, for removing what little restriction there is left on imports. Australian publishers buy the rights to sell English-language titles in Australia, and sell the rights to Australian books for overseas publication. Buying rights to promising books for the Australian market generates income required for paying royalties and employing the personnel involved in the publication, distribution and marketing of books within the Australian

copyright territory. Abolishing territorial rights would mean that our publishers would have to compete for all international rights from a position of clear disadvantage to their US and UK competitors. They would also be in a far weaker position to negotiate overseas rights for their Australian authors.

I ask, therefore, that the Commission give due consideration to the full consequence to the industry and the people employed within it, of the proposed parallel importation when making its recommendations to the Government.

Yours sincerely,
Sara Dowse