

**SUBMISSION BY SALLY MURPHY
TO THE PRODUCTIVITY COMMISSION
ISSUES PAPER: COPYRIGHT RESTRICTIONS
ON THE PARALLEL IMPORTATION OF BOOKS**

As an Australian children's author, reviewer and educator I wish to register my dismay at the proposed changes to the Copyright Act in relation to the parallel importation of Books, and urge the commission not to implement these changes.

It must be noted that the New Zealand Copyright Act was similarly altered in 1998, resulting in a slowing of growth in the New Zealand publishing sector. It is also of great concern that other countries, including the US and UK, have no plans for similar changes, meaning that Australian publishers will not have the same access to overseas markets as overseas markets will have to Australia.

As an author, any flooding of the local market with cheap imports will impact on my earning capacity. Like most children's book authors, my income is already low, in spite of having 27 books in print. I rely on both my spouse's income and part time teaching work to supplement my earnings. Any further erosion of my earning capacity would make it increasingly difficult to exist as an author.

Many local publishers rely on sales of big name foreign titles to supplement their local publishing program. All publishers already need to compete with imported titles, but losing their first right to publish foreign titles, and also facing increased competition from a flood of cheap imports, will decrease their ability to publish Australian content.

For myself, many of my books are uniquely Australian and are suitable to be published by Australian publishers for Australian readership. My most recent title features, for example, a big blowfly, a drought, and an outback setting. Of my four forthcoming titles, one features an Australian animal, and another an Australian event. Neither of these books would be published if it were not for local publishing programs.

Whilst I can and have sold manuscripts to overseas publishers, this is always a difficult task, as, quite rightly, foreign publishers give precedence to publishing their own local authors. For this reason, the Australian publishing industry must be allowed to survive and flourish, without being exposed to unfair competition.

As a teacher, I am also alarmed at the prospect of cheap imported children's books flooding the market. Imported books tend to use American spelling and grammar and have stories set in contexts which Australian children cannot relate to. Starting the school year in fall, having snow days and heading to the drug store for a soda are just a few of the irrelevant events children are exposed to. Whilst being aware of foreign customs and contexts is not in itself a bad thing, being exposed to these as the norm is surely a step back into the bad old days when Australian books were few and far between.

I have read arguments that increasing the flow of cheap books will allow lower income families access to more books for their children. Whilst there is some case that buying books can often be an expensive exercise, I have seen little evidence that offering cheap books encourages lower socio-economic families to buy them. For example, the popular Scholastic book clubs which run in most schools offer books from as cheap as \$1. In my own experience, however, families with no understanding of the value of books rarely buy from these clubs in spite of the low prices. The lack of books in many Australian family homes is a problem which must be addressed, but increasing the number of cheap books of questionable quality is not necessarily a solution.

As a teacher, I encourage my students to read quality works, by both Australian and overseas authors. Cheaper books, whilst not necessarily lower in quality, are often just that. I would rather see my students read one well written, well edited book than read five books with incorrect spelling and grammar. Our children are already bombarded with foreign media in the form of television shows, computer and console games and music. The current quality of Australian produced books ensures that they are offered some content which portrays the Australian experience, focuses on Australian history and culture and, importantly, uses Australian spelling, grammar and language. Any threat to the ongoing publication of such books is deplorable.

Finally, as a book reviewer who reviews only Australian books, I am dismayed at any threat to the wonderful depth and wealth of Australia's publishing program. Whilst our big name authors have international success and are likely to continue to be published widely regardless of any changes to the import market, what of the many new writers who are uncovered each year? And what of the small publishers who already battle for survival? No program can compensate every publisher, author or would-be creator for the negative impact of the proposed laws.

In recent years I have been delighted to see a flurry of Australian-themed Christmas books celebrating the uniqueness of Australia's Christmas, and replacing tales of snow and ice. This is just one example of the growing determination of Australian publishers to produce local content which is relevant to Australian children. Imported books cannot offer this unique perspective. In the case of Christmas books, for example, imported books overwhelmingly offer tales of snow, ice and snowmen.

The Australian publishing industry is populated with talented authors who deserve to be encouraged to continue to hone their craft, and with publishers who encourage local talent. Australian authors, even those whose books are sold in foreign editions around the world, work with local editorial staff and develop working relationships with these staff in a way which can't be achieved if such staff are located in New York or London or some other corner of the globe.

For the readers of Australia (especially young readers), the creative talent of Australia and for the publishers who invest in such talent, I urge you not to bring in the proposed changes.

Thank you for taking the time to read my submission.

Sally Murphy

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