

SUBMISSION TO PRODUCTIVITY COMMISSION ON PARALLEL IMPORTATION OF BOOKS

I am a widely published author of children's stories and novels, adult historical fiction and some non-fiction. Having strong connections also with many other writers through membership of boards (May Gibbs Children's Literature Trust, ASA Committee of Management) and other networks, I am aware of the deep concern felt at all levels of Australia's writing community about possible changes to the current Parallel Importation rules. For every person like me who takes the time to make a submission, there are hundreds who either are not able or feel too intimidated to do likewise, but who share this malaise.

The current system of the 30-day rule still works well and the Australian book publishing industry is flourishing. I endorse all the points made in the comprehensive submission from the Australian Society of Authors, but since most areas have been covered very well by many respondents, I want to concentrate on what I see as the potentially disastrous impact that the proposed changes may have on Australia's literary culture. The misguided concept that people will read more if books are a little cheaper (or is it that big book chains will profit more?) is going to make it very much harder to tell our diverse stories in our own voices.

Our writers are already disadvantaged in that they have been undervalued by funding bodies in comparison to practitioners of other forms of the arts for many years. This situation will be exacerbated if the Productivity Commission's terms of reference are not refined to add a cultural component.

Stuck on to my workstation is a quotation (unfortunately anonymous) from a charity calendar, which has for many years reminded me of the importance of what I do as a writer and mentor. It reads: *'In the end, there is only one thing on which a community will wither or grow – its capacity to nurture and value the ability and creativity of all its people.'* The excellent nurturing that does take place here (a lot of it done by volunteers) will be of little use if our publishing industry collapses.

As a writer for children from babyhood to adolescence, and also a creator of Australian historical fiction, I write with a strong sense of place and an awareness that I am encapsulating unique aspects of our culture. Largely because of this local focus, my work is produced mainly by smaller publishers, since the bigger ones rely on overseas sales. It is these independent publishers, and the emerging writers and illustrators whom they foster, who will suffer most when bookshops are jammed with cheap overseas imports. I hope that the South Australian publisher who has shown interest in my fictionalised reconstruction of the emigration from Ireland by my great-grandparents in the 1850s survives until my manuscript's completion.

I would prefer not to have to tailor my work to suit an overseas market, but should my title have an overseas edition, it may be quickly remaindered there, with copies – on which I would receive no royalties – sent back to sell more cheaply than the locally produced stocks. I know that this is conjecture, and that there are other uncertainties as to price, the types of books imported etc. But after much study, one thing seems certain to me: Australian creators will be the losers if the current provisions are not retained.