

Monday, 19 January 2009

To the Commissioners,

In 1837 Charles Dickens was one of the biggest-selling authors in America. Tens of thousands of his novels sold in America. How much did he earn from all these sales? Not one cent. Without copyright protection, American publishers ripped off Dicken's work, flooded the market with cheap copies and paid the author nothing. Sir Walter Scott sold 10,000 copies of "Ivanhoe" in two weeks, but died penniless and destitute thanks to dishonest overseas publishers and the absence of copyright protection.

Today, copyright laws offer much better protection for authors, particularly from overseas publishers who frequently pay authors significantly lower royalties than Australian publishers.

In 1991, the Hawke-Keating government introduced the innovative and ingenious 30-day rule to protect the rights of local authors and publishers. This law prevents books from being imported provided an Australian edition has been released within 30 days of the book's publication worldwide. The 30-day rule ensures that publishers bring out Australian editions promptly, and prevents overseas publishers from dumping low-royalty stock in Australia, maximising the benefits for writers, publishers, and the book-reading public. This law has seen the blossoming of Australian publishing, with international critical acclaim, commercial success and a thriving culture of local language, literature and culture, as evidenced by Melbourne's recent success in being nominated as UNESCO's second city of literature.

The average income of a writer in Australia is a mere \$4000 per annum. Very few writers make more than a modest income from their work, income which is frequently jeopardised by less scrupulous (often larger) publishers. Yet writing and publishing books generates over \$150 million per year for the Australian economy. Please help ensure Australian writers and publishers are recompensed for their contributions to Australian culture and our economy by supporting the 30-day rule and opposing the parallel importation of books.

As an author, I would probably not be able to publish the books I have without a thriving Australian publishing industry. As a reader, I would not be able to read the books that tell our own Australian stories, in our own words. Parallel importation of books will not guarantee additional cheaper books, but it will guarantee fewer good ones.

We need Australian books and Australian publishing. We need the 30-day rule.

Yours sincerely,

Dr. Danielle Clode BA(Hons) DPhil(Oxon)
Author and Reader