

# Submission to the Productivity Commission on the Parallel Importation of Books

20 January 2009

I wish to add my voice to what I hope is a loud chorus of protest against removing the thirty-day rule and sweeping away Australian territorial copyright.

In the last twenty-five years, I have published ten books of fiction, non-fiction, biography and social history with Australian publishers, mostly large internationals; as a book editor, I have edited hundreds more, including novels by Kate Grenville, David Foster, Peter Corris and Roger McDonald. I have therefore been in the privileged position of observing, and I hope contributing to, the growth and maturity of a way of seeing the world, and expressing that view, that is peculiarly our own. Like so many other things that are uniquely Australian, it must be protected at all costs. And, like so many other things that are uniquely Australian, it is under threat by forces whose lack of understanding will cause untold damage to our culture, damage that cannot be fixed.

It seems very clear to me that if overseas publishers were allowed unrestricted access to our market, without territorial copyright protection, they would dump surplus product here as cheaply as possible, while continuing to sell their more desirable titles by local and international authors, at whatever price the market would bear – a price controlled in this country by manufacturing and distribution costs, and by the size of our population.

Because of the size of the Australian market, we cannot take advantage of the economies of scale that benefit larger English-language markets. Quality local literary books have a short shelf life (six weeks to two months maximum) in which to establish themselves. It is difficult enough to get independent bookshops to stock them, even when published by the local subsidiaries of multinationals, against the competition of foreign bestsellers. It's even harder to

persuade Dymocks, Borders and Angus and Robertson to publish a literary title by a small Australian publisher.

I am not sure what proportion of Australian writers can make a living by royalties alone, but I am willing to bet it is less than 10 per cent. I've never managed it after twenty-five years of pretty solid work.

As a result of the projected changes, smaller Australian publishers and independent bookshops – the backbone of publishing in this country – are likely to go under. Australian literary culture is built largely on the goodwill and commitment of local writers and publishers. Why, when local publishers and writers are already facing the uncertainty of the global financial crisis, would you open the floodgates to dumped overseas titles and remaindered overseas editions of Australian titles? Why would you help smaller local publishers to go out of business, why cause larger ones to cut back on their local lists even further, resulting in fewer editorial resources and less promotion of local authors?

No other country that values its literary culture has done this. Why should we?

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