

To: The Productivity Commissioners

20 January 2009

Dear Commissioners,

My name is Barry Jonsberg and I am an author of eight books for Young Adults and children. I have been published in ten countries and translated into five languages. Given that my first book was published in 2004, I suppose I might be considered to be a prolific, successful and established author with a wide Australian and international readership.

I am extremely concerned about the proposed surrender of Australian copyright which would have a devastating effect upon my writing career. At present I am writing full-time and my income is considerably less than when I was employed full-time as a teacher. Two of my books have recently been remaindered in the U.S. If copies were to be 'dumped' into the Australian marketplace then I would receive no royalties from the product of my own labour. This erosion of my earnings would force me, and many others like me, to either severely curtail my writing or abandon it altogether. Possibly Australians might be able to buy my books for a few dollars less, but at the cost of future publications.

My current success, such as it is, is directly attributable to the faith, expertise and commitment of my Australian publisher. Publishers, editors and marketing staff have invested considerable time and money to make my writing as good as it can be and bring it to the widest possible audience. Without their hard work, it is extremely unlikely that my overseas publishers would have paid me any attention. Allowing parallel imports would put intolerable pressure upon my Australian publishers, who would be competing in a global market under seriously disadvantageous terms. Neither of the two big players in world publishing, the U.S and the U.K., allow parallel imports. It appears absurd to me that Australia would deliberately consider playing into the hands of these giants by giving up rights that they themselves so fiercely protect. It is akin to proposing that the Australian cricket team should compete internationally with blindfolds on.

I do, of course, have contacts with overseas publishers, so I am in a better position than many Australian writers. But I want to write Australian stories for Australians. Publishers in the U.S and the U.K. tend, naturally, to favour authors from their own cultures. Possibly I could continue writing but I suspect that I would be forced to write what I think might sell in America rather than the stories which spring from our own culture. This, I believe, spells the death of creativity and erodes our literary identity. Australians should be proud of our literary heritage and protect it, rather than seeking to undermine it.

Should Australian copyright be surrendered, publishers here will become very reluctant to invest in new Australian writers. It is already risky and publishers, like any other business, have to consider the balance between investment in a product and projected profits from that product. Allowing parallel imports changes the dynamics fundamentally.

My Australian publisher gave me a chance. I would hate to think that I might be amongst the last to be afforded that opportunity.

Yours sincerely,  
Barry Jonsberg