

Dear Commission

I am strongly opposed to the parallel importation of books and urge you to consider the true costs associated with this move.

Books are perhaps one of the most important “building blocks” in our lives. Early childhood experts have long recognised the benefits of introducing books into children’s lives at the earliest opportunity. Even in an era of instant access to a world of information, including literature, printed books continue to be a critical, tangible, and core element of our society – for younger and older readers alike. They are part of our cultural heritage.

The authors, illustrators and publishers involved in the creation and distribution of books cherish that heritage along with their readers.

I am the author of two children’s picture books and relatively new to the world of publishing.

While like most other authors, I aspire to earn a living from writing, it is more likely to be a dream than a reality, particularly in Australia which has a smaller market place for everything, including books.

Permitting the parallel importation of books by Australian authors and illustrators would simply erode those small opportunities even further.

Books should be affordable and accessible for everyone. However, the ability to import books in larger quantities possibly at a lower price at the expense of locally produced material is not the answer. It would simply mean ceding control of our valuable publishing industry to off-shore interests – and in this case that can’t be in the interests of the Australian community.

Parallel importing could also limit the scope and variety of books with overseas companies vested with the power to select material according to their ideologies.

The world has grown smaller because of our ability to communicate more effectively and quickly but it would be wrong to stifle the passion and creativity of authors and illustrators supported by their publishers, simply to accommodate the interests of other markets, other countries.

Each country has its own cultural heritage which must be protected – not just for the creators, not to prop up an industry some may regard as ailing if it is deemed to be in need of safeguards – but for Australians, for our community, for our children.

Preventing parallel importation doesn’t restrict competition - rather it encourages a vital market in Australia.

Perhaps the Commission might consider greater support for public and educational libraries, and encouragement for schools to re-employ teacher librarians, when weighing up the costs and benefits.

Chris Hornsey

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