

## **Submission to the Parallel Importation of Books Productivity Commission.**

Dear Commission,

I am an Australian author and illustrator who has been in the industry for twelve years, and am writing in support of upholding restrictions on parallel importation.

In the past 12 years I have illustrated over 50 books, written five, participated in festivals across Australia, and I am an occasional lecturer at tertiary, secondary and primary levels. To date, Australia has been my primary market where the bulk of my work is produced and sold. Right now I am also working for the UK and am beginning to expand into other foreign markets. Books exhibiting a local flavour however, will always rely on production and sales in a local market so some of my work will always be produced here.

I will try to be succinct. The success of an open market rests largely on the existence of an open playing field. Were the UK and the USA to open their markets as we are proposing to do, then there may be some potential benefit to some Australian creators. But this is not the case. The UK and USA's copyright territories are vigorously protected and will continue to be. One of the problems of publishing in Australia has always been the relatively small population and hence marketplace for Australian books. This means that when publishers project how many sales they can expect of a given book, and produce the requisite numbers, these print-runs are very small. For a picture book they average about 3000 copies, in my experience.

In the USA and the UK things are different. Their marketplaces are vastly larger than ours, print runs are bigger and the cost per book (for both the producer and the buying public) is less. If we open our market, things for these countries become still rosier. Their excess stock can now be shipped for Australian sale at a price that will severely undercut our books.

All those authors and illustrators who have done well began somewhere. I was certainly given my first break by a local publisher. Book publishing is not an intrinsically profitable business and what is published often falls into two groups – those books which pay the rent (like cookbooks, true crime, pop-star biographies, blockbusters) and those that define our culture and society (histories, literary works, local popular culture works, books that deal with local issues). Books that sell continually over fifty years and become icons and the classics we all love and laud – are not often the blockbusters of the day. But a publisher knew they had something special which should be published and that Australia would be richer for it. My fear is that these are the books we will lose. They are the books that are paid for, in the short term, by the sales of the blockbusters. And it is the blockbusters that will be undercut by foreign publishing houses offloading their excess stock, or viewing Australia as a new extension of their own market. The books of uniquely Australian content would never be picked up by a foreign publisher.

In short, there seems to be nothing in it for us. In the current climate when we are predicting a massive downturn in spending, the book industry will suffer like any other.

This is the worst possible time to be opening our doors to parallel importation. With the introduction of lower priced books, the price-expectation is also lowered. But the ability of Australia to produce more books, or to produce them more cheaply will not have changed. If we were to experience an open door to the UK and USA's markets then we might be able to compete. But their markets will remain closed. Australian publishers, authors and illustrators will be solely disadvantaged.

I believe that the removal of copyright restrictions on parallel importations will have a direct and lasting effect upon the local industry. I believe that local publishers will be less likely to be able to publish newcomers who have no name-power. Over time, it is our literature that is a lasting descriptor of our society, our culture and our thoughts as a nation. Fostering an environment where local books are economically viable allows these books to come into existence. It's tough enough already. We should not even contemplate creating a situation where Australia loses out so completely.

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