

Productivity Commission Submission

Parallel Importation of Books

The Australian School Library Association is concerned about a number of detrimental outcomes which may result from changes to the Copyright Act to allow the open parallel importation of books.

As the managers of school library budgets, teacher librarians are certainly keen to pursue opportunities to maximise our capacity to meet the diverse learning and teaching needs of our students and staff in our selection of resources. However, we feel that in relation to parallel imports, an argument based ultimately on an economic rationale is short sighted and flawed. Cheaper books may be desirable, but not if the cost is the viability and integrity of Australian works.

A primary concern is the editing process which occurs when Australian works are 'translated' for a major market such as the USA. Authors of significant standing who are the bread and butter of Australian school libraries have had their work altered for publication in this way. Emily Rodda,ⁱ Andy Griffithsⁱⁱ and Nick Earlsⁱⁱⁱ have all experienced this process, and while that may be seen as necessary to tap into these mass markets, the concern is that parallel importing will result in Australian school libraries being stocked with Americanised versions of Australian works. As Earls has stated, "for Australian readers they would make the book an inferior product, and it is highly unlikely potential purchasers here would be made aware of that. These books are not the same, but they would be sold as if they were." (ibid)

The nature of this 'inferiority' is at the heart of our concern: we need young Australian readers to have ready access to stories and literature which absolutely and inherently reflects the nuances of their own cultural experiences. While communication itself may increasingly become a global experience, the idea of losing our 'Australianness' through homogenising Australian story telling is a genuine concern.

Furthermore, the potential for Australian authors and publishers to flounder in a market dominated by parallel imports is a real worry for Australian educators. Within the school librarianship profession, our relationship with literature authors is a fundamental element in the development of literacy skills for all levels of education. The combination of access to good quality Australian literature and the availability of Australian authors to work with us in our schools greatly enhance our promotion of literature competency and literacy. The young minds we work with in our schools and school libraries are the authors of tomorrow.

We strongly urge the commission to ensure that any decision taken in relation to this review safeguards and strengthens the opportunities for budding authors to be published and read in Australia.

Thank you for the opportunity to make this submission to your inquiry.

Regards,

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President

Australian School Library Association

ⁱ <http://www.news.com.au/dailytelegraph/story/0,22049,24831847-5006009,00.html> Available online – accessed 16/1/09

ⁱⁱ <http://www.amazon.com/Day-My-Butt-Went-Psycho/dp/0439424690> Available online – accessed 17/1/09

ⁱⁱⁱ http://www.asauthors.org/lib/pdf/zSubmissions/2008/Nick_Earls_Parallel_Imports_July2008.pdf Available online – accessed 17/1/09