

Submission to the Productivity Commission

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From Mark Carthew – Australian Children's Author
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Re: The study into the rules concerning the parallel importation of books.

Dear Commissioners.

As a person involved in the education and trade publishing industry as an editor and writer over the last twenty years, I wish to draw the Commission's attention to a number of key points of concern for book creators and distributors in Australia. My views are also informed by my experience as a primary teacher of 27 year's standing, an Education Dept of Victoria Consultant, Sessional Lecturer in Language Education and Tutor in the Master of Arts (Writing) at University level.

The many passionate submissions to the Commission highlight the significant impact of the proposals on both our creative culture and publishing industry. I also believe we should take into account the end consumers of our collective creative endeavours and products – the children and adults of Australia who benefit from a unique perspective of the world with quality of creative output.

As someone who had had first hand experience of being published in our markets and also overseas I wish to offer a perspective and some reflections.

Some Key Reflections

A healthy Australian industry needs publishers based in Australia and prepared to encourage home grown talent in writing, illustrating, publishing, editing and design. There are also many other unheralded, yet extremely important jobs in publishing including desk top operators, marketing personal, sales and list goes on; all providing employment onshore. Off shore bases of publishing houses will have a detrimental effect not only job potential at the book creation stage eg authors & illustrators, but also the in-house and freelance positions at Publishing Houses within Australia.

As an author published by a number of different publishing houses, some small and others large, I can say with conviction that we all need Australian publishers to be encouraged invest in the creative talent within our own country. Those who argue that a free & open market increases opportunity, may like to try and break into the strongly protected enclaves in the UK, Canada and USA and reflect on their limited success. While some authors and illustrators do experience success in obtaining contracts overseas, it would only represent a miniscule number of direct contracts obtained by the vast majority of Australian authors and illustrators. If I was relying on that possibility, my latest trade books may never been published and award winning

primary educational series that reflect our unique creative culture and also provided opportunities for other Australian authors and illustrators may have never eventuated.

If we wish to encourage talent in our country we need to expand opportunities for publication, not decrease market accessibility. The proposed Parallel importation changes would impact negatively on opportunities for local creators. The commission need to be fully aware of the responsibility entrusted in any decisions made and the long term flow on effects of changes to the regulations.

This is not just about making books cheaper for consumers or creating a supposed level playing field. It is about keeping the playing field.

As the recent distribution affair with a major bookstore publicly highlighted, it is hard enough for small and large publishers to distribute books to the major supplier's outlets without making it harder through competing with a dumping of cheaper and more 'profitable' overseas books. This argument may stand up if those sellers used the profits made on those titles to actually stock books distributed on behalf of smaller companies or titles with lesser known Australian & New Zealand authors; however my personal experience with this indicates the opposite is already occurring and that situation will be made even worse.

Market forces could potentially create a culturally and artistically narrow 'siphon like' sink hole effect, with a stock focus on low priced remainders, popularist titles, tie in products and big names in the book market – a trend that is already here as the supermarket chains & retailers spread into the book trade. While Publishers well know the pitfalls of lower and lower profit margins in a tight distribution environment, authors and illustrators are also feeling the negative impact, as more and more contracts are tailored to reflect a royalty based on percentages of heavily discounted prices and net receipts; equalling little return for the creator.

Publishers will battle to compete with overseas conglomerates and would therefore be increasingly reticent to take investment risks on the smaller names and a huge number of Australian creators would I suspect be driven to ponder the sanity of pursuing ideas related to book creation in such a disheartening environment.

In Summary:

- I urge the commission to reflect on the opportunity presented to protect and value the creative talent of Australia and the vibrant industry based around supporting the same.
- Workers on the land, the car industry and film industry, television networks et al. have had and still have systems of support and protection in place, without which there would be potentially limited or even no Australian owned and / or operated industry.
- Smaller publishers in particular who have traditionally helped establish the careers of many Australian writers and illustrators would potentially go under, therefore severely limiting opportunities for future and ongoing publication of Australian talent.

- Without protection, children of future generations may well read books and resource materials increasingly created off shore, devolving a sense of place and cultural resonance – with a potential focus on price points as opposed to quality in production and embedded with idiosyncratic cultural values from the current larger markets such as the USA & UK.
- Creators need to be remunerated fairly and reasonably for their efforts and producers need encouragement to invest and export. As much as one does not like to pre-empt human nature, distribution ‘loopholes’ motivated by profit could potentially see imported products remaindered back into our market without proper recompense to their creators. Other countries have copyright protection and we as creators and producers deserve the same.

I strongly oppose the changes to the regulations and hope the commission sees fit to acknowledge the extent and range of opposition evident in the submissions. A high quality and vibrant educational and trade publishing industry has been built up over many years and these proposed changes threaten to erode those enormous achievements and devalue their greatest asset - the creators themselves.

Regard your good name as the richest jewel you can possibly be possessed of - for credit is like fire; when once you have kindled it you may easily preserve it, but if you once extinguish it, you will find it an arduous task to rekindle it again.

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Yours sincerely,

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