

20<sup>th</sup> January 2009

To The Commissioners

Dear Mike Woods and Louise Sylvan,

I am an Australian author and freelance editor, published in Australia and the US.

I believe the proposed changes to the current importation and copyright regulations will adversely affect Australian publishing, without due benefit. There are many links in the chain of book production and retailing. While I sympathise with the pressures that booksellers face in competing with international sellers, and while I believe that making (internationally produced) books cheaper for consumers has some obvious short term benefits, I simply believe that the losses will far outweigh the gains.

Simply, we have a wonderful publishing industry in Australia, an industry that contributes to the intellectual, cultural and imaginative growth of Australia – from which we all benefit. The fact is that this is possible because Australian publishers are able to compete in a fair market. Please don't threaten our cultural heritage in the interests of a marginal discount (which may or may not be passed on by the booksellers to the consumer). Brick and mortar booksellers can offer plenty that online booksellers don't offer, such as attentive customer service, a tactile experience, personalised recommendations and ambience... They can also offer free postage within Australia, as Readings does on their website, entirely negating the advantages of ordering cheaper books from overseas and then paying the alarming postage costs. Online competition does not have to be a death knell for local booksellers.

Books are a unique product and should never be treated simply as a consumable object – they are not a toothbrush or a shoe. They are still the most effective way we have for transferring ideas from one person's head to another. They must be looked at as both a consumer product and as a mode of cultural production. Books help us grow, they help us understand each other, they help us work out who we are as a nation, they educate us, they show us where we have been and where we are going, they fill us with ideas and knowledge and possibility and hope. We need books about Australia, by Australians, for Australians. And in a market where Australian publishers cannot compete, such books will become an endangered species.

Best wishes,

Penni Russon