

Submission to Productivity Commission's Draft Report on Copyright Restrictions on the Parallel Importation of Books

Comments regarding draft recommendation 7.1

I am a writer of young adult and children's fiction, publishing with Penguin books after starting my career with small publishers Fremantle Press and Lothian Books (now Hachette Livre). My work has a heavily Australian focus, and reflects the lives and experiences of Australian children and teenagers, past and present. Because of this focus, my work has not been published overseas to date, and I will therefore not be directly impacted by the draft recommendation. However, the impact of such a change in copyright law on Australian publishing generally is, as your report acknowledges, inestimable - but evidence provided by writers and publishers suggests that allowing parallel imports at all - whether 12 months after a book's first publication in Australia or otherwise - will be negative and long-lasting, and will decimate a vibrant and important aspect of Australian culture.

While I understand the Productivity Commission is trying to walk a cautious line by recommending that parallel importation be permitted 12 months after a book's first publication in Australia, the recommendation ignores the reality of book publishing in this country. I can attest to the fact that books for children and teenagers regularly continue to sell significantly in their second and third years, for various reasons, including the fact that awards shortlists, which have such an impact in the children's publishing arena, are announced in the year following a book's publication. To allow parallel importation at this point would a) rob Australian writers and publishers of their dues, and b) will discourage Australian publishers from taking chances with risky or new authors, as they will only have 12 months to recoup the investment they have made in a particular book. This will have a disastrous effect on the encouragement of new writers, and will mean that we will never be able to produce another Tim Winton, Elizabeth Jolley, David Malouf, Kate Grenville, Sally Morgan, Paul Jennings, Shaun Tan, Ursula Dubosarsky, Margot Lanagan, to name but a few. In addition, overseas publishers are (often) only interested in Australian writers after they have been tested in the local market, so this will have a further negative effect on Australian writers trying making an impact on the international scene - something that is mitigated against well enough already by the difficulties associated with overseas publication.

Comments regarding draft recommendation 7.2

By the time the changes are reviewed, it will be too late. We will have lost the expression of ourselves and our culture through literature; we will have a homogenised publishing scene interested only in publishing writers who can sell quantity; and, worst of all, this will have happened for the sake of a misapprehension that it will make books cheaper. Even if this were true - and there is precious little evidence suggesting it is - it is too high a price to pay for the loss of the artform that speaks directly to Australian's hearts, and enriches their lives.

Other comments: psychic income

I wish to add a note relating to the rather odd inclusion of the mention of 'psychic income' on page 2.11. I'm sure that staff members at the Productivity Commission and elsewhere also receive some internal satisfaction from the work they do. Nevertheless, I am sure they would not expect to see reference made to this in a report which has a potentially adverse effect on their earning capacity. If the recommended changes to parallel importation are brought into being, however, psychic income will be the only income available to Australian writers.

I implore the Productivity Commission to reconsider its draft recommendations for the sake of writing and publishing in Australia.

Julia Lawrinson