

Parallel Importation of Books Study
Productivity Commission
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I would like to respond to the Productivity Commission's draft report on Parallel Importation of books. I believe it is vital to retain territorial copyright for the following reasons:

Australian stories told through overseas publishers are often altered. With the American publication of my books, not only has the language been 'Americanised' but the Australian characters have American nationality. If Parallel Importation of books is allowed, my Australian written books about Australian kids would have not one semblance of being Australian. I believe removing the restrictions will mean Australian kids will be reading fewer books about themselves and their own backyards, even when those stories were written here.

ASA Chair Dr Anita Heiss commented: "However, we are profoundly grateful the Commission has concluded these restrictions are important to maintaining our national culture. It's about time our culture was recognised for its own intrinsic value.'

Australia's literary culture benefits from territorial copyright.

Australia is in the very rich position of 60% of all books sold in Australia being of Australian origin. A position unthinkable 50 years ago. We as a nation enjoy buying books as evidenced by our 2 billion dollar industry. We have, at present, an efficient and creative territorial copyright regime and a thriving independent bookselling sector, something that is all but disappearing in other countries. Why would the government risk damaging that enviable position by removing Parallel Import restrictions?

Why would an Australian publisher invest in an Australian author if there is the risk that companies such as Dymocks, who are in favour of Parallel Importation, would buy the books overseas rather than locally? I believe this could lead to the closing of Australian publishing houses, irrevocable damage to our cultural identity, the loss of jobs and the eroding of a local industry in favour of overseas publishing industries. At a time when the Australian economy is struggling, why would the Australian government choose to deliberately harm this industry when they have been working so hard to protect so many others?

The Commission itself admits in its discussion draft that there will be ‘a leakage of income to overseas authors and publishers.’ This will result in Australian writers being penalised for success and new authors will find it increasingly difficult to break into the industry. According to page 2.11 of the draft, a creator receives satisfaction from generating a manuscript as well as monetary reward. Many Australian authors already struggle to make a living as writers and have to supplement their incomes in ways other than writing. As the royalties received on overseas books are less than a book locally produced, removing Parallel Importation restrictions will mean further reducing the income of an author. This, I believe will discourage local authors from writing and seeking to be published, resulting in the watering down of our culture.

Dr Jeremy Fisher, ASA Executive Director says, “There’s no evidence they’ll produce more Australian jobs or reduce book prices.’

It is absurd in these tough financial times that the Commission would promote a position that would put the Australian publishing industry in jeopardy. The UK and US governments protect their authors’ territorial copyright by banning parallel importation. Australian authors and publishers should expect the same protection from their government.

I urge the Australian government to retain territorial copyright, as in the US and UK, to protect the Australian culture, Australian authors and illustrators, Australian jobs and an Australian industry that many people have worked so long and hard to build.

Kind Regards,

Deborah Abela

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