

Submission to Productivity Commission on Parallel Importation

Parallel Importation will significantly impact on my ability to earn an independent income as an Australian writer.

I would like to register my opposition to the proposal to lift restrictions on the parallel importation of books. Such a move would have a significant impact on my ability to earn an income as a writer.

I make my living from the sales of my popular fantasy books, and am now earning an independent income which means I no longer apply for grants from the Australia Council to support my private writing. The income from my fantasy books subsidises my poetry (I am a prize winning and internationally published poet) and the theatre criticism I do on my well-regarded blog THEATRE NOTES, both time-consuming activities I pursue for reasons other than financial reward.

My fantasy books are published first in Australia, by Penguin Books Australia, and overseas publication follows in the UK, the US and Europe. This means that there are at least two English language editions of my books sold overseas, as well as the Penguin editions.

There seems to be a small but significant fact that is being glossed by booksellers' blithe claims that authors "still earn their royalties". **I earn a significantly higher percentage of royalties from books sold in Australia than from those sold overseas.** Books that are published and sold here earn me the full 10 per cent royalty of the cover price. Books that are sold in overseas markets often have a smaller royalty – ranging from 6 to 8 per cent – and after that, under the agreements from my original publisher, I lose from 25 to 50 per cent of the gross royalty to the original publisher. This is a standard agreement which publishers all over the world use to ensure that their initial investment in an author is financially recognised.

This means that for every book sold in Australia that is NOT published by Penguin, I could lose up to half – or more – of the income I would earn if it were published by the local publisher. This is significant proportion of the income that I generate as an author. And this is why territorial copyright is important to my financial independence.

Territorial copyright is a right for all authors in the United Kingdom and America. Under the Productivity Commission's suggested changes to the copyright law, Australian writers will no longer be able to compete on the same terms with writers in these countries.

The argument as presented by those who seek to lift restrictions is that it would make books cheaper for the consumer, and that those who oppose it are greedy corporate publishers. This is a populist argument with little regard for facts, and it certainly ignores the potential impact on authors. The best way to make books cheaper for consumers would be to make them exempt from the GST. It was always a scandal that books were included in the first place.

This proposal would have a significant impact on the local publishing industry, which on top of cutting my income, would have indirect effects as well on my ability to continue to write and publish in this country.

Artists are routinely urged to become self-sufficient, but parallel importation would make this goal even more difficult than it already is. If the Rudd Government claims to be backing a Creative Australia, why is it entertaining a proposal which would make it much harder for authors to earn a living, in a profession in which earning a decent living is already a rarity?

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Alison Croggon is a poet, novelist and theatre critic based in Melbourne. As a poet, she won the Anne Elder and Dame Mary Gilmore Prizes, and has been shortlisted for several Premier's Poetry Awards. Her critically acclaimed fantasy quartet *The Books of Pellinor* is a popular success in Europe, England and the US and was shortlisted in three categories in the Aurealis Awards, as well as being a Children's Book Council recommended book. She is Melbourne theatre critic for the *Australian* newspaper and runs the highly regarded theatre blog, *Theatre Notes* (theatrenotes.blogspot.com).