

Supplementary Plea To The Productivity Commission

Parallel Importation Of Books

Morris Gleitzman 15/4/09

Dear Commissioners

As an internationally-published Australian children's author with 20 years experience, I read the your draft report with alarm.

How, I asked myself, could a body charged with advising on community welfare propose policy changes that will do such damage to future generations of young Australians?

I don't think you want to do that. I hope you'll find a way of discharging your responsibilities as a commission without doing that. And so I beg you to consider again the serious implications of diluting territorial copyright.

Australian children need Australian stories. Ask any teacher.

Australian children's authors need all the help they can get early in their careers. Ask any publisher, editor, bookseller or librarian.

Over several generations, Australian children's publishing has developed to the point where Australian authors can now give their complete attention to providing Australian children with the stories they need.

But for each author getting there isn't easy. Many don't make it. Those of us who have got there know we wouldn't have made it, and our books wouldn't exist, without territorial copyright during those crucial early years. Not one crucial year. Or two. A lot. So many that trying to legislate a number could be fatal.

The draft report proposes significant changes to the territorial copyright that currently protects Australian authors. The implications of this for our literary culture are grave. In particular, the draft report recommends allowing the importing of overseas editions of Australian books from 12 months after their publication in Australia. This would include overseas remainders.

Australian authors with US/UK editions and an in-print Australian backlist would be seriously affected. Wholesalers and booksellers could bring in our overseas remainders at rock-bottom prices and sell them at any price they chose, very probably undercutting the capacity of our Australian publishers to keep our backlists healthy.

The more established of us would probably survive this, but authors earlier in their careers, for whom every royalty dollar local and overseas is critical,

would be caught in a tragic irony. Their overseas editions could come back and destroy their local backlists, and therefore the financial basis of their careers.

Even established authors would have to consider not allowing their books to be published in other English-language markets, with a consequent loss of export earnings for Australia.

And the ability of Australian publishers to nurture and build future generations of Australian authors would be crippled. The current generation of established children's authors can't last forever, and there would be no new ones.

Future generations of Australian children would not get the stories they need.

How much damage would that do those young people? What would it do to their self-confidence, their capacity for empathy, their skill at recognising universal truths in the particulars of their lives, their understanding that heroes can be local, their enthusiasm for social cohesion, their pride in our shared values, their ability to feel good about themselves?

Ask any teacher.

Yours sincerely,
Morris Gleitzman