

I support the immediate and unconditional lifting of parallel restrictions on the importation of books.

I am not, like many of the other people who have made submissions to the Productivity Commission, a professional writer, publisher, or artist. I am an amateur writer and poet, a participant in performance poetry events, a blogger, and a zine maker. I currently have zines selling at a local store, Sticky Comics, but will not make a profit out of them.

While the continuing existence of parallel restrictions on the importation of books has some short-term benefits for a small minority of industry professionals (writers and publishers), these restrictions also –

- Lift book prices, because of the drive to make higher profits by publishers within Australia
- Make it more difficult and expensive for people in related professions – academics, teachers, and educators – to purchase books for students
- Make it more difficult/impossible for people on a lower income to sustain a reading habit.
- Allow big publishing businesses to make huge profits due to lack of overseas competition

Furthermore, the restrictions on the parallel importation of books are becoming irrelevant to an increasing number of parties: there exist a number of alternative markets for writing (online books and bookstores, blogging, performance poetry, zine distros) that are not covered by these restrictions. And, at a time when communication and transport is becoming easier and cheaper, it is no longer feasible to devise legal or contractual restrictions upon the importing or exporting of books. Larger publishers and booksellers have some flexibility and resources that allow them to compete with online book markets and publishing, but smaller booksellers could simply go out of business. A lifting of parallel importation restrictions would allow them to source cheaper internationally published books rapidly.

Similarly, writers and artists who choose not to work with major publishers derive no benefit out of the parallel importation restrictions. Those of us who choose to write on blogs, make zines for friends or for the ‘alternative market’ (for want of a better description) find such importation restrictions utterly irrelevant.

Australia is an egalitarian country, and it is difficult to understand why any law should be in place ensuring the welfare of a narrow group of publishers and writers at a time when expanding markets for writing on the internet and around the world make these laws increasingly out-of-date. It would be nearly impossible and undesirable to devise similar legislation for internet book markets: why then should legislation exist that perpetuates and cements the privilege of those who choose to write and publish in accepted and traditional forms?

Strong campaigns have been run for a number of months by groups like the Australian Society of Authors in support of retaining current restrictions on the parallel importation of books – see here for their petition:

<http://www.ausbooks.com.au/petition.php>

The ASA wishes to present a view of united opposition to the lifting of restrictions on the parallel importation of books. Hence the strong representation of views of this nature in submissions to the Productivity Commission. However, this is to an extent misleading: campaigns by the ASA and other special interest groups sideline views of equal importance and validity. One such alternative opinion can be found here:

<http://www.onlineopinion.com.au/view.asp?article=8451>

Bob Carr, former Premier of New South Wales, is of a similar view:

<http://www.theaustralian.news.com.au/story/0,25197,24774541-26063,00.html>

This is clearly not just a right-wing free-traders argument. It affects large parts of the community aside from those who write and publish in traditional mediums, and over the long-term these restrictions have been deleterious to Australian culture.

Parallel importation restrictions serve to entrench the interests of a small minority at the expense of a majority of Australians, and further the privilege of a few while restricting the opportunity of the many. They should be lifted, immediately and unconditionally.