

I oppose the implementation of the Productivity Commission's recommendations with respect to the Australian publishing industry because they will have a catastrophic effect on Australian book publishing and Australian writing.

Australian publishers will not be able to compete with overseas publishers who can dump books here at somewhat cheaper prices because of economies of scale due to larger print runs. This latest attempt to implement the extreme deregulated market ideology that has already led to the current global financial and unemployment crisis will lead to the devastation of the Australian book publishing and printing industries and to the loss of very many jobs. It will also strangle Australian writing and by doing that, it would weaken our sense of who we are as Australians. For it is our writers who record and preserve to us and to our children what it is that defines us.

Without a healthy Australian publishing industry first finding and then nurturing Australian writers there would be no Tim Winton, no Kate Grenville, no Peter Carey, no Elizabeth Jolley, no George Johnston, no David Malouf, no Helen Garner, no Alexis Wright, no Alex Miller, no Peter Goldsworthy, no Thomas Keneally, no Michelle De Kretser, no Stephen Carroll, no Andrew McGahan, no Richard Flanagan and no Christos Tsoolkias. There would be no Patrick White. Only a few of our most commercially successful writers would ever end up being published by overseas publishers. Should the overseas popularity of those few writers ever wane, there would be no viable Australian publishing industry left to keep their books available for Australians. The stories of a once vibrant and unique culture would become historical curiosities.

Australian writers invest years writing and refining and updating the nation's narrative. Most of them hope to make just enough to get by, just enough to keep writing. Australian publishers, for their part, invest time and money trying to find homegrown talent and then grooming and promoting it. They do it in the hope of profit but they also do it to maintain one of the nation's most valuable resources; its sense of self. If Australian publishers were motivated solely by profit they would be selling not books but fast food, alcohol, tobacco and gambling. If the real objective of the Productivity Commission's recommendations is to lower the price of books for Australian readers the government need only remove the G.S.T. from books published in Australia.

The narrative arts are where a nation's soul is recorded and stored forever. It is a grave mistake to risk its destruction in the hope of a small advantage in the price of books that cannot even be guaranteed, the only advantage promised by no one and nothing more than the failed doctrine that has led to the current global economic crisis. We are a small population, historically new and far from the major population centres that share our language and our broader cultural heritage. But we have a culture of our own and it is a culture worth identifying and preserving. The narrative arts remind us of it, they remind us of who we are and that we matter. The implementation of the Productivity

Commission's recommendations threatens the viability of Australia's narrative arts by threatening the economic viability of Australia's writers, publishers and printers. This is why I oppose them and why I implore the government to reject the recommendations.

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