

April 9, 2009

Attn: Jill Irvine – delivered via email

Hello Jill

I wish to voice my dismay at the proposed legislation to abolish the rules regarding parallel imports for books. I genuinely believe the price that Australia's publishing industry will pay – especially its authors – is too high and has the potential to be incredibly destructive across all facets of our industry.

Australia is proud when its writers succeed with their books in major overseas markets; in my case, I have just begun to achieve the sort of credibility I need on a world stage. My Australian readers form the platform from which I can lure overseas readers to buy my books. However, the proposed changes to Legislation would mean that my publishers here will (a) no longer want to publish me locally because there will be a reduced market for the locally produced goods if the very nasty cheap American versions are imported, and (b) if my publishers did try to maintain quality and publish my books, then the advance to me is going to be significantly reduced...perhaps to the point where it is no longer viable for me to write as my full time occupation even though it's taken me nearly a decade of juggling to get to this point of being able to fully support my family.

Australian books are well produced, they maintain a high standard of production quality, our bookshops are of a very high level and the industry works from a strong platform of quality. The American versions are printed on cheap paper, poor typesetting, very cheap production, low level editing, zero marketing and I'm incredibly disappointed that our country would want to happily open the floodgates to that sort of book being sold nationally. I am fortunate that my books are published in all English-speaking markets and various European languages but I know my income would be drastically cut if I relied on Australians buying end of the line runs from Britain or the US for instance. And as for new writers, I suspect such copyright changes would be consigning most to a creative life in the wilderness, for no local publisher looking for a return on its investment is likely to give a range of new, young writers the sort of opportunity I've had to not only be published but nurtured.

'Cheap' books are not the answer for a healthy publishing industry. It will not mean that more money can be generated. I would urge the Commission to take a look at a market such as France that produces books to a superior high end product. Having just returned from the 2009 Paris Book Fair, I can assure you that the market there is healthy. People were not hesitating to buy my books in translation at nearly 30 euros each. The dozens of people queuing to buy admitted to me that although they could order a cheaper version from America or Britain they hated the very poor quality of the overseas product.

I am patriotic enough to want my books published in Australia first - by Australians - and for an Australian version to be read by Australians, with the Australian cover, done by Australian artists, printed by Australian printers. Deregulation of the Copyright provisions will mean that not only author incomes will be genuinely threatened, but Australian jobs will almost certainly disappear rapidly across all sectors of the publishing and printing industries.

If the other markets such as UK and the US protect their copyright regimes, why are we – as a nation – not keen to ensure the Australian publishing industry enjoys similar rigorous protection and remains strong?

The very last thing writers need or deserve is any interference in the present copyright system that gives them some security in an increasingly dangerous world where pirating intellectual property is rife.

Please do not interfere with the existing copyright provisions. They protect the income of authors around Australia, they make it possible for Australian publishers to invest strongly in our books and for the local industry to flourish. That is surely a situation worth protecting.

Sincerely

Fiona McIntosh