

To the Parallel Importation of Books Study

Re: RESPONSE TO THE DISCUSSION DRAFT FOR THE RESTRICTIONS ON THE
PARALLEL IMPORTATION OF BOOKS

15th April, 2009

While I appreciate that the discussion draft synthesises the arguments of a wide variety of differing viewpoints on Australia's Parallel Import Restrictions, I have major concerns with Draft recommendation 7.1 in which you propose that PIRs should only apply for twelve months from the date of first publication of a book in Australia.

My concern is based on your argument supporting this change which correctly acknowledges "the desirability of retaining an incentive for Australian publishers to invest in works by new local authors" (7.16) but then justifies the shorten period for PIR protection by arguing that, "in most cases, the bulk of the returns to publishers will come from sales in the months following first release" (7.17).

As I tried to emphasise in my first submission to the commission, the process of gaining a foothold in the market for a new Australian author is one that can (as in my case) take many years of sheer unrelenting hard work involving the consistent production of new books and extensive nation-wide touring and promotion to build a solid and loyal readership. This process obviously takes a great deal of investment of resources on the part of the publisher and great deal of time on the part of the author – in my case a solid twelve years from the publication of my first book, "Just Tricking!" in 1997 to the present day. (NB: this does not take into account the extremely financially precarious ten years prior to 1997 spent developing my writing skills, presentation skills, business skills and developing contacts within the industry.)

In the first twelve months from April 1997 to April 1998, "Just Tricking!" sold approximately 12,000 copies. Obviously this was three times more than the average sales for a typical book in Australia, but relatively minor compared to its subsequent sales between April 1998 to its present day total of almost 180,000 sales in Australia alone. This figure was achieved by the Pan Macmillan initiated program of publishing a subsequent "Just ..." title every year and supporting each new title with an extensive tour. The focus of each of these tours was on the new book, but every tour had the effect of re-stimulating the sales of each of the titles in the backlist.

I believe a healthy Australian publishing industry needs to be based on the assumption that authors and publishers not only can, but SHOULD be trying to create books that will have lasting reader appeal beyond an initial 12 months. Just because "in most cases, the bulk of returns to publishers will come from sales in the months following first release" (7.17) does not mean that we should take this as a self-evident truth of publishing. This seems to me to both an unnecessarily myopic and self-limiting basis upon which to base policy. Classic books become classic books precisely because they do have lasting appeal

beyond their first twelve months. Australian publishers and authors need all the help that they can get in maximising a book's chances of success in this regard.

By suggesting that PIRs be retained for 12 months you have acknowledged that PIRs are necessary to protect the local market, but surely the local market is going to benefit far more over the long term if books can be protected over their whole publishing life rather than an arbitrary – and as I hope I have made clear – far too brief a period as twelve months.

At every event on tour I always meet a handful of shining-eyed aspiring writers, inspired by the fact that it is possible for an ordinary Australian child from the suburbs to have a successful career as a full-time author. While always offering them encouragement and assuring them that this is both a worthy and achievable dream, I also emphasise that the profession of writing—perhaps more than most—requires massive dedication and persistence.

To this end I have attached a recently received transcript of a class talk given by an Australian Grade 3/4 student in which he explains his own dream of becoming an author. I hope you find it as inspiring and touching as I do and that you will not make any recommendations that unnecessarily endanger the possibility of Matthew's dream coming true: he is potentially one of the next generation of Australian writers that we need to protect and nurture.

In conclusion, I note that in Box 7.4 you mention that the possibility of limiting PIR protection to Australian Authored books had “intuitive appeal” and although a “live” option in early inquiries had to be ruled out because of the Australia-US Free Trade Agreement. This is most unfortunate as I believe an Australian-authored unlimited PIR would have been ideal. As it is not possible, however, I believe that rather than rolling the dice and risking all that the currently vibrant Australian publishing industry has achieved over the last thirty years, that it is far more sensible and prudent to leave the current PIR regime in place until an overwhelmingly convincing option for change presents itself. I do not believe that the proposed 12 month PIR is this option.

Yours sincerely,
Andy Griffiths

Attachment 1:

Good Morning 3/45

Who would have thought that you could get paid thousands of dollars for writing a book called "The Day My Bum Went Psycho" or "Just Disgusting" or "The Bad Book".

These are all books written by the one and only Andy Griffiths. If I wasn't me then Andy Griffiths is definitely THE person I'd really like to be.

He is a famous Australian children's author who has so far written 17 funny books. Why would I like his life so much?

Well, firstly I'd love the life of an author.

I love writing myself. You can let your imagination run wild creating weird and whacky stories, which is exactly what he does. He comes up with these incredible stories, a bit rude but overall very funny.

And you get paid for it - for doing something you love. Andy has made lots and lots of money out of his books. He has so much money he could even choose

not to work anymore - but he keeps writing because he loves it so much.

Then there is the satisfaction of giving pleasure to so many children.

It would be a fantastic feeling knowing how much laughter you're giving to a whole lot of kids. On top of that, there are lots of children who hate reading, but when they see the titles or covers of his books - they actually WANT to read them, and for many of them that's the kick start they need to learn to love reading.

Another great thing about being an author is that you are your own boss. You can just get up and take breaks and not be couped up in an office all day! In fact, you can take your work with you wherever you go - all you need is a pen and paper and your creative mind.

So if it's nice and sunny, work outside in the sun. If it's cold and miserable, you can work in front of a nice warm fire. If you don't feel like getting out of your PJs, don't! In fact if you want to work from bed, you can.

I think life as Andy Griffith would be awesome!!!

By Matthew Murrie

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