

Many of our customers have been asking us why Dymocks booksellers have sent a letter to their customers asking them to send a letter to Dymocks to support their stand on changing the copyright laws of Australia. In response we have sent them the following letter that I submit to you for your consideration in this matter.

A letter to Shearers loyal customers from Tony and Barbara Horgan

Dymocks have stated that by changing this law books would be more readily accessible to the Australian public and would therefore be cheaper than the current prices. Obviously Don Grover and Bob Carr (a board member of Dymocks) have not been visiting their local independent bookseller over the last 17 odd years. If they had they would know that any book that they wanted was readily available through their independent bookseller at a competitive price and be available within 3 -10 days at their local bookshop. To state as he has done that books are not available to Australian consumers because of copyright restrictions is erroneous and misleading.

What is more concerning to us as an independent bookseller is the possibility that if the government changes the law to allow any book to be freely brought into the country irrespective of the copyright owners rights, is that Australian publishers and distributors may well take the hard nosed decision to reconsider their investment in Australia and reduce the number of titles they carry in their warehouses and carry only stock that supermarkets and discount stores require. This would mean less staff being employed in their distribution centres and less customer service to the bookseller, meaning slower service to our customers and less choice of readily available stock.

Many people may well argue that this would bring down the prices of books, although this is a rather spurious argument as those who shop in discount stores already know the range of books they carry is already discounted. Even if it is across a very narrow range of titles. Supermarkets will not increase the range of titles they carry because of prices.

As an independent bookseller we offer a range of titles across a wide spectrum of genres, from popular fiction, children's books, study guides for all students to specialized medical titles not seen in many bookshops in Australia. This is because the majority of these books are available within Australia and can be delivered to us within 7 days. For those unavailable in this country we can import them if they are available from overseas normally within 15 days of us placing the order. Depending on the price our supplier invoices us we compare favourably with the published price overseas.

However our main concern is that our local suppliers may decide that their investment in stocking and publishing local books is under threat because they no longer own the exclusive rights to titles one year after they have invested thousands of dollars in developing and promoting an author. This would mean our ability to obtain the range of titles we currently carry is under threat. We certainly can obtain titles from overseas, but if Australian authors such as Tim Winton, Kate Grenville, Morris Gleitzman and David Malouf were no longer published in Australia, but were published overseas, the initial costs from overseas publishers would be higher than they would be in Australia.

As a children's bookseller we know that supermarkets and other department stores do not have specialist children's bookselling staff to advise customers. To suggest more children will read more widely because books may be cheaper is wrong, and in fact may mean that many inappropriate books may well be sold to children by well meaning but untrained staff. A real problem for parents and teachers.

We strongly support the idea of an Australian version of copyright as proposed by the Australian Booksellers Association. This would ensure that the Australian publishing and bookselling industry would remain vibrant and maintain our cultural identity.

There would be no commercial reason for an overseas publisher to publish an Australian book quickly to suit the Australian market, so a title may well appear here without any promotion as local distributors would only bring in quantities that they deemed to have a minimal risk. So those titles not deemed worthy of being carried locally would rely on individual booksellers being aware of what was being published in America and Britain. While we do this now, with the help of local suppliers, it would add significantly to our costs in keeping up to date with what was being published overseas. Having to order books without a sample, advance proof reading copies and relying on images on the web and overseas publishers information about titles who have no understanding of the Australian market and its readers would add to our risks, and have an upward pressure on prices. If this affects independent booksellers it would also impact on all booksellers prices.

Currently we buy new titles from our suppliers in Australia on a sale or return basis. If the books have not sold after a period of one year we are able to return them and replace with new stock. If we have to buy from overseas we buy on a firm sale basis, (this would add extra risk to purchasing new titles meaning we would be even more careful with our selection of the titles we carry)

If a new book comes out from an unknown author, (and every author at one stage was unknown) we evaluate from early reading copies and make a decision on how to promote the title based on what we and our staff feel of the book. Books published and distributed in Australia at the moment mean we have early advance knowledge, the support of a local publisher who is happy for us to take a risk on ordering large quantities of the title. This enables us to do window and in store displays, have author events and signings in our shop, promote books to libraries and schools and generally support our local community.

We also feel that the Writers festivals we currently enjoy in all states of Australia would be under threat as publishers would be loathe to fund the expense of bringing out authors to Australia if they had no certainty of selling the authors works to the Australian market.

If we had to buy most of our books directly from overseas the ability to work with publishers on promoting new books would be diminished, as most if not all of the above would not be available to us.

In Australia independent booksellers make up over 20% of the total book market. In Britain independent booksellers sales amount to less than 5% of sales their and in the USA independent booksellers sales amount to less than 3%.

In Australia the federal and state governments offer significant prize money for literary awards, The Prime Ministers award and the Premier's awards. As these awards are for new Australian writing the vast majority of these books do not make it onto the supermarket shelves before the awards are announced. These books become successful because of the promotional work done by independent booksellers and some chain booksellers.

If we have copyright territoriality removed in Australia we may well see the Prime Ministers and Premier's literary awards drop dramatically in their prestige as the publishing of quality new writers may shrink dramatically. Many new adventurous young writers will not be picked up by Australian publishers, because they won't make major investments if they stand to lose the rights to a work after 12 months. Will the Prime Minister's literary award be as important if it is first published overseas? In fact if it is published first overseas will it be eligible for an award? What may happen in the future is that the quality of published writing in Australia may drop so much that the Prime Ministers award and the Premiers awards may fade into obscurity because no one is interested in average writing.

As an independent bookseller we feel threatened by the potential harm to our business if these changes to copyright protection are enacted. We employ 15 staff in our shop, all who have a love of books, and can offer our customers enthusiasm, knowledge and research skills to find those books our customers want and who come to us because they know we can help.

If this proposal becomes law there is a fair chance that over the coming years a large part of our income, books that are written, published and printed in Australia will drop to a level that would dramatically reduce our profitability. We may well see less people buying books, not because they are too expensive, but because the excitement of new Australian writers appearing on the market has declined to an extent that as a percentage of our business it is less than 5%. The percentage of Australian written and published titles sold in our store is currently over 15%.

If you feel as we do that the proposal to change the copyright laws has the potential to do significant damage to our cultural heritage in the future, and that a law is being made that is based solely on a perceived basis of price then we would appreciate it if you would write about your concerns to your local member, as well as Mr. Kevin Rudd, Prime Minister and Lindsay Tanner, Finance Minister.

Thank you for taking the time to read this letter

Tony and Barbara Horgan

Shearers Bookshop

Leichhardt NSW