

To the Commissioners,

Today I stood on the street in Brisbane and protested against the lifting of the restrictions on the Parallel Importation of Books. While my intention had been to voice my protest and inform the public, the outcome was that I in turn learned a great deal. Parents, grandparents, teenagers and young people stopped and talked eagerly to us, asking questions. Our leaflets ran out in minutes, so great was the interest. Most interesting to me was when a NZ author on holiday here in Queensland paused to tell me that the publishing industry in NZ had diminished considerably since the restrictions on Parallel Imports had been lifted in her country. She said that NZ authors had very little hope of being published and had turned to other professions to support their families.

That quietly spoken, private and shy individuals such as authors should feel compelled to stand on a busy street corner approaching strangers in protest at the possible lifting of the restrictions on PIRs shows very clearly that we fear for our livelihood and our future.

I am an emerging writer, a mother, a teacher and an aunt. I buy a great many books by Australian authors for my children and myself. It is my intention that my children, students, nephews and nieces grow up with a strong sense of self and an identity of who they are as Australians. Australian books by Australian authors, which display Australian content with Australian spelling and reflect Australian social and cultural values and indigenous beliefs are one of the few sources still available. Young people are already bombarded with more than enough popular American culture and language in the forms of music, movies and food without taking away the only resource left to them which reflects who they are – Aussie books.

Therefore I respond to the Productivity Commission's Discussion Draft and wish to make the following observations:

- Books will not necessarily be cheaper. There is no guarantee that the 'saving' will be passed on to the consumer. The price of books in NZ has not dropped as a result of the removal of PIRs where the choice of local content has narrowed.
- The publishing industry in Australia will diminish as it did in NZ, where many publishers have closed their doors. Smaller publishing houses will close due to the strong competition of remaindered books being dumped in Australia. Larger publishing houses will lose their autonomy and become subsidiaries of their mother company overseas. And because they will no longer be as profitable, the mother company may decide to move their Australian interests off shore.
- This will result in a loss of jobs in the publishing, printing, writing and illustrating industries, which could mean we end up paying more for our books not less due to the lack of competition. Sending jobs off shore is not desirable and hardly makes sense considering our economic downturn.
- As stated by the Australian publishers on page 5.5 of the draft report "40% would need to reduce their annual output of new Australian titles". This will mean little opportunity for a new author such as myself to break into the

market. Publishers will not be able to afford to take a risk on investing their time and money in new talent. As new talent continues to be overlooked, the old will wane or re-invent itself to suit the international market, thereby losing the Australian content and flavour in our literature.

- Income for authors will fall substantially. Most children's authors receive little more than \$5000 per book and may only have one or two published in a year. At present the 10% royalty they receive barely helps them make ends meet. If remaindered books are dumped on the market, as will happen should PIRs be dropped, these authors will receive zero for these dumped books and have even less chance of selling the copies published here in Australia, further reducing their income. Receiving zero in royalties is unfair and un-Australian.
- Psychic income – oh pleeee...aaase. Should I even dignify that with a comment? Authors are already supplementing their meagre income with various part-time jobs, school visits, conference talks etc. I enjoy singing in the shower, but I don't consider it to be psychic income. I enjoy writing and expect to be paid so that other people might enjoy reading my work. This is a profession, not a hobby. And we all have families to feed.
- As stated on page 3.1 – Very few Australian writers are the beneficiaries of government grants and literary prizes. Such a small percentage (about 1%) that I do not even know anyone who has received one. This is not to be included as author income.
- On page 6.4 the draft report cites that "Harry Potter books are considered by some to have been the most important in promoting children's reading, both in Australia and overseas". Harry Potter is a fantasy set in a mythical world and for this reason children all over the world can relate to the characters. But not all children's books are fantasy-themed. When not reading fantasy, Australian children need to read books that reflect their world, their culture, their history. As a child I grew up on a diet of UK and USA literature for children. At 10 years I wrote my first long story and set it in the USA, because I believed that nothing exciting could possibly happen in my own country to a kid like me. I do not want that for my children and grandchildren. I want them to have a strong Australian identity in all its many variations.
- The removal of PIRs will greatly disadvantage the children's book industry. The draft did not look into this at any great length. Fewer picture books will be published here, because they take longer to recoup the investment made by the publisher and they are more expensive to produce. With the competition of remaindered books being dumped here (as is the problem in NZ) publishers will be less inclined to invest in picture books and especially new authors. Australian kindergartens, childcare centres, pre-schools and junior classrooms rely on the Australian picture book for the reinforcing of our children's idea of self and their place in the Australian world around them. Can you imagine a world without 'Possum Magic'? Have you surveyed Australian early childhood educators?

- Literacy – Remaindered books will end up replacing Australian children's literature for all of the reasons cited above. These books will have foreign spelling, words replaced to suit the foreign market (such as sidewalk for footpath) and even whole passages changed or left out. Australian children already struggling with literacy will be further confused when their parents buy them the remaindered books. Often the socio-economic group most struggling with literacy will also be the group most likely to buy these confusing books.
- Humour – In children's books and in adults, humour is unique to a particular culture, a particular country. Books edited for the American market will change passages which are humorous to us because their readers will not understand the joke. These books will then be dumped here in Australia. Reading for enjoyment then will be a thing of the past.
- It is jarring for me to read a book with Americanized spelling. It pulls me out of the story and I no longer enjoy it.
- Consumer choice will be narrower as a result of the removal of PIRs. With fewer publishers and independent booksellers, choices will be limited to what the multinational booksellers decide to offer us. Quality in publishing will be like a fine wine no one can afford.
- Independent booksellers – As small businesses, independent booksellers do not have the buying power to compete with the multinational booksellers and will not be able to access as easily any cheap overseas books. This includes the cost of freight, sourcing etc. This may result in the loss and closure of many if not all in the future. And it is the independent bookseller who offers real choice and supports Australian authors.
- Australian books cost more in Australia because it is the Australian publisher who has invested the time and money in their production. Lifting the PIRs will undermine all their work as cheap replicated editions of their publications flood our market. This will force the publisher to produce fewer Australian books, take fewer risks with new authors and be less likely to re-print books of current authors.
- The 12 month rule will further complicate the publisher's situation. This time restriction would not allow the publisher to recoup his investment making him reluctant to publish new works in the meantime. New authors need more than 12 months to establish their readership and often with a 2nd book, an author's first book is re-released (after the 12 months is up). Often following awards such as the CBCA sales can increase and this may happen after the 12 months is up also.
- Most consumers do not understand the full ramifications of the lifting of the restrictions. Very little public awareness has been raised during the course of the Productivity Commission's research. The Coalition for Cheaper Books petition to their bookclub members not been fully informative. More time is needed to better inform the public.

In conclusion I recommend that the present system is maintained and the Restrictions on the Parallel Importation of Books is retained in its present form.

If the restrictions are lifted I believe

- The healthy Australian publishing industry will be adversely affected.
- Our unique Australian culture will be at risk.
- Our children's literacy levels will fall and their sense of identity will be lost.
- Quality books will increase in price not fall.
- There will be less choice for the Australian reader.
- That many Australians in publishing, printing, writing and illustrating books will lose their jobs.
- Australian authors will become part of history as they look for other work.
- Independent booksellers will be forced to close.
- New talent will be lost

In anticipation that you will make the recommendations you know in your heart and mind will be the ones to benefit Australians and their children the most, I thank you for the time you have taken to read my submission.

Yours faithfully

Angela Sunde