

15 April, 2009

To the Commission,

I have always boasted that unlike film and television in this country, young Australians read Australian novels. This has been my experience as a writer and as a teacher. Yet for the first time since I was published I feel as if this boast is under threat. While I appreciate the wonderful novels written by overseas writers and the place they have on our shelves, I fear that in the long run, our culture and distinctive Australian voice will be lost if there is a change to the territorial copyright that currently protects our authors.

My first novel, *Looking for Alibrandi*, was published in 1992 and was a uniquely Australian story that went on to be adapted into an Australian film in 2000. It has been part of the NSW HSC syllabus and has been studied extensively in schools around the country as well as in Italy and Germany and published in fourteen countries. I've always felt proud of this story and the impact it has had on many young people around the world and the pride Australian teenagers have expressed in my depiction of their world. I can't begin to comprehend the impact that a change in territorial copyright would have had on my career as a writer if these changes had taken place seventeen years ago. I know that I would not be working full time as a writer now and I fear for the careers of young or first time writers at this present moment. In the last month I have had the pleasure of reading three novels to be released mid 2009 - wonderful works written by first time writers, Christine Hinwood, Christine Bongers and Amra Pajalic. I would hate to imagine an Australian industry that cannot publish their next novel because copyright requirements has forced them to stop writing due to reduced income, or a decline in Australian publishers.

I have recently returned from the Bologna Book Fair, overwhelmed by the amount of publishers and books, wondering how our novels and picture books survive in such a massive market. Yet we do hold our own as Australian writers. The first novels I saw on the shelves in a London Waterstones bookstore, just last week, were Simmone Howell's *Everything Beautiful* and Randa Abdel Fattah's *Does my Head Look Big in This*. This year I was proud to be the recipient of the US Michael L Printz Prize for Excellence in Literature, an award that has honoured Australian writers such as Markus Zusak (twice) Margo Lanagan (twice) Sonya Hartnett and Judith Clarke in the past. These novels provide, not merely an Australian story but an Australian voice, regardless of where they are set. Many US blogs comment on the excellence that comes from Australia when it comes to YA writing. I believe that if the Commission goes ahead and changes territorial copyright not only are they doing us a disservice but are denying overseas readers the opportunity to read novels that don't reinforce Australian stereotypes, but explore a sophisticated contemporary world, or mindset, where the focus is not on cultural cringe but a brave new world of language and storytelling.

It amazes me that such a direction is taking place at our most exciting time on the world stage and I implore the commission to allow current copyright protections to remain in force.

Yours sincerely

Melina Marchetta