

## TO THE COMMISSIONERS

I have been a published author for about twelve years now. Although I have written for both the domestic and export markets, the bulk of my work consciously has an Australian flavour. I do this partly because that is the voice within me, but also because of a sense of duty to my readers. We have our own stories in this country, and they should be told in our unique way. It's part of our identity.

We are largely defined by our culture. It gives us our sense of uniqueness and individual worth in a world that is rapidly becoming generic – one brand bland. And a large part of this definition comes from our stories. If we lose those stories, we lose an important part of ourselves, a part that will be nigh impossible to revive.

The proposed changes to parallel importation of books threaten to cause just such a loss. They do this especially because they endanger two key sources in the creation and dissemination of our tales: the story tellers (authors and illustrators); and the publishers (particularly the independents) who take risks in a small market such as Australia.

It is already difficult making a living as an author or illustrator in Australia, without making it even tougher. And that is precisely what these changes will do. Well established authors will survive perhaps. Others will struggle on because they love what they do, or because they do it from a sense of commitment. But many will go under, that's a definite. They'll simply give up. And new authors – exciting new authors prepared to experiment with new voices – will become woefully scarce.

The same applies to good publishers. Who will bother to take risks with new authors, new ideas, and new ways of telling our tales when the pickings are so pathetically slim?

We have a remarkable capacity in this country to undersell ourselves, to undervalue the human resources we have. That is why innovators go elsewhere for recognition. That's why entrepreneurs leave in the end. Because even when we have something reasonably healthy and viable (such as our present publishing industry) we still seek to destroy it for some unfathomable reason.

That's what these new proposals for parallel importation of books will do. They will threaten a healthy and reasonably viable industry of good authors and good publishers who are willing to take risks. But worse still, in so doing they will also cut at the very core of our culture. We'll lose part of our heart and soul in this. What a crying shame that would be.

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