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Friday 17th April 2009

Parallel Importation of Books
Productivity Commission
GPO Box 1428
Canberra City ACT 2601

The Commissioners,

Re: the Productivity Commission's Draft Report on the Restrictions
on the Parallel Importation of Books.

Melbourne University Publishing (MUP) is one of Australia's oldest independent publishing houses with a history of prestigious and nationally significant books dating back to the early 1920s. For over 85 years, MUP's focus has been on finding Australian writers with Australian stories to tell for Australian readers. Australian editors, designers, typesetters and printers have assisted MUP to bring to Australian readers 50-80 new books a year. Those titles have directly addressed the ideas, issues, and themes pertinent to the national identity. The generosity of both the University of Melbourne and a benefaction by Russell and Mab Grimwade have provided the financial support and intellectual milieu that are the necessary pre-conditions for producing books of national significance and with the highest editorial and production standards.

Until the 1970s the corporate history of the Australian book industry could be summarised simply as a colonial depot for excess stock from British publishers. Australian readers were compelled to wait until American titles were sold to British publishers who in due course decided when to ship what quantity of a select list of American and British titles to our shores. British publishers decided the reading habits of Australian readers. The Whitlam and Fraser governments produced a cultural renaissance: the Australian voice was given expression in films, art, music and books. An authentic and indigenous Australian cultural identity was brought into being by government fiat with the establishment of such agencies as the Australia Council and

the Film Commission. Overnight, Australian stories told by Australians with Australian accents were available to Australian consumers.

In the book industry, like the other cultural industries, independent publishers and booksellers emerged alongside multinational publishers who saw the commercial benefits of investing in local writers. A proud cultural nationalism fuelled Australian publishing for two decades. By the 1990s the Australian publishing scene had matured sufficiently to view itself as local in origin and global in practice. We discovered that we could make world books in Port Melbourne and St Lucia and North Ryde.

The publishing industry blossomed in the certainties provided by a copyright framework that protected the ANZ territory and for the past 30 years now publishers have published Australian writers for both the local and the international markets. With increasing vigour we have also persuaded American publishers to abandon their traditional practice of selling British publishers what are still symptomatically and anachronistically termed “commonwealth rights”.

While over the past two decades Australian consumers have enjoyed the benefits of a thriving Australian publishing scene, we have also witnessed the demise of the local film industry. Australian films represented a paltry 4 % (of which 2% was delivered by *Happy Feet*) of the total box office revenue taken in Australia in 2008. The loss of a local film industry has done the Australian consumers a great disservice. How can it be in the national interest for Australian consumers to be deprived of Australian content? The consequences of an open market on the cultural landscape are obvious and verifiable.

The Australian publishing industry is a success story that has been made possible by the political and commercial commitment to the principle of copyright protection. It is in that environment that local book publishers have created consumer appetite for Australian content. Sixty percent of the books sold in Australia are now Australian.

The Productivity Commission’s draft recommendations on territorial copyright will deliver profits to American wholesalers with excess stock and multinational publishers with the cheque books to buy up world rights. However, Australian readers will have access to fewer titles from fewer publishers with higher prices. Printers will be forced to increase print prices and the consumers will find books are more expensive, not less. Independent booksellers with their particular commitment to hand selling beloved Australian authors will close their doors before the tsunami of cheaply conceived, cheaply written and cheaply produced books.

The Productivity Commission’s brief has been to analyse the book industry with a view to ensure the Australian consumers interests are protected. Its draft recommendations reveal a flawed logic, incorrect economic analysis and a disturbingly partisan ideological bent.

The recommendations ignore the realities that writers grow; they don’t spring fully formed with their first books. Writers need to be nurtured and readers require cultivation. This is a much longer task than the proposed 12-month’s proposed “protection” will offer. Australian publishers committed to the view that *ideas* matter

will be denied commercial certainties of a marketplace. While Australia opens itself to the global market place one doesn't need to listen too hard to hear the guffaws of our American and British colleagues and the chi- ching of their cash registers.

The Productivity Commission's draft recommendations will wind back the clock on a proud and profitable indigenous publishing culture, reduce the availability of Australian stories for Australian readers and hand a monopoly back to multi-national publishers who will make decisions about our market far removed from the local realities. What a remarkable finale that will be for the many deeply committed and devoted readers who have for so long now voted with their wallets for Australian writing.

I urge the Productivity Commission to respond to the informed and reasoned arguments assembled by writers and their agents, publishers, printers and booksellers and reconsider the draft recommendations. It is in the national interest that the current regulatory framework for the protection of Australian territorial copyright be retained.

Louise Adler
CEO & Publisher.