

From Patrick Allington, freelance writer, editor, critic & researcher

I do not wish to repeat in detail arguments already made, other than to state that I endorse the position taken by the Australian Society of Authors in both its initial submission and its post draft report submission.

I am what the book industry rather optimistically calls an 'emerging writer'. My first novel will be published in 2009 by an independent Australian publisher; I write regular literary criticism for newspapers and magazines; I edit the fiction of other Australian writers; and I supplement my income with teaching/professional work in the tertiary education sector and with various editing and research tasks. Ideally, I would spend more time writing and less time juggling various other types of employment, but I believe the current system at least provides writers who persist with a fighting chance of surviving and perhaps even prospering in their chosen field. In other words, the current system is 'hard but fair'.

In contrast, I strongly believe that the Productivity Commission's recommendation that territorial copyright should end after twelve months of publication will put serious and sustained — not to mention unreasonable and unnecessary — pressure on writers (established as well as emerging). It will weaken Australian publishing and create disadvantages for Australian writers relative to writers in other international territories. Like me, many writers already earn more income from their non-writing employment than from their writing. If the government adopts the Productivity Commission's recommendation, I believe the negative consequences will lead many prospective and emerging writers to doubt — properly so — whether we have any prospect of sustaining a writing career. Writing takes time and isn't often lucrative, but a writer at least has the asset of his/her copyright. But the Productivity Commission's recommendation appears to treat intellectual property with contempt — all to create supposed benefits to consumers that are, at best, dubious and wrong-headed.

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