

Dear Commissioners,

Independent booksellers play a vital role in promoting literacy in our communities, and this contribution should be valued and recognised by the Productivity Commission. The Productivity Commission's recommendation that PIR protection should only apply for twelve months from the date of publication of a book in Australia betrays an inadequate understanding of how independent bookstores work.

The Little Bookroom has a long and proud history as an independent bookstore. Founded in 1960 (Australia's first children's specialist bookstore) it is widely recognised as an authority on children's literature, old and new, as a promoter of children's literature and of the various organisations that have been formed with this purpose in mind. Albert Ullin, the founder of The Little Bookroom, has been well recognized for his significant contribution to children's literature. He received the Dromkeen Medal in 1986, has served on various judging panels, including the Victorian Premier's Literature Award and the CBC Crichton Award, he was made an Honorary Life Member of the Children's Book Council of Australia. The culmination of Albert's achievements came when he was awarded The Order of Australia Medal in 1997 for his services to children's literature in Australia and overseas. We, the current owners of The Little Bookroom aspire to continue Albert's legacy into the next fifty years, as do many of our colleagues both within our speciality and beyond into the independent sector. Albert is not alone as a bookstore owner publicly appreciated for his contribution to the community, there are many more examples of booksellers playing key roles in the construction cultural capital in this nation.

We work hard to promote good books. We work hard to promote literacy. And we work in partnership with schools, public libraries, peak bodies (the Children's Book Council of Australia, the Centre for Youth Literature, the Victorian Premiers Reading Challenge), authors, illustrators, publishers, the media, parents, grandparents and children. We are sought out for advice by all because we are engaged in dialogue with all – that is our unique role to play in this challenge to bring books to children. We ask that the Productivity Commission recognise this fact.

The success of our business owes a lot to the success of our industry and we could not in conscience support any changes that would negatively impact on our partners. It is unacceptable to us that creators could face a drop in royalties and that independent publishers that admirably seek out new talent (examples include Text Publishing and Scribe) face losing a significant slice of their market. Book retailers had an excellent Christmas despite the global financial crisis and our industry has remained largely unaffected suggesting that the current legislation is effective. Why undermine its strength.

The Little Bookroom is a valuable resource to the community. Customers have been able to rely on us for good advice about what to read, or read to their children as the case may be. We make recommendations that take into account personality and match with appropriate content (which take a lot of time and research) etc. We console our customers when they request a book about grief to help their young ones accept the loss of a loved one. Department stores and websites are unable to provide a service that rivals this, and it is a service people value enough to travel long distances for.

The recommendation of the Productivity Commission that PIR protection should only apply for 12 months from the date of first publication of a book in Australia does not adequately reflect the reality of the market. We rely on locally available backlist to sustain our business

– most of our retail customers arrive in our store looking for old favourites as birthday gifts or essential additions to their children’s home libraries. Our customers know and love these titles, and want to share them. We are one of few booksellers who consistently stock an extensive and worthwhile range of backlist titles and wish to bring to your attention the fact that department stores and chains do not stock backlist (especially children’s) and therefore any recommendations that reduce the amount of backlist available through local suppliers will harm independent shops (who rely more on backlist than other booksellers) disproportionately.

The closure of independent bookstores in Australia is simply an unacceptable conclusion. We agree with the Australian Booksellers Association) that the closure of independent shops will have a direct impact on the local community through:

- Loss of jobs and income to the surrounding community
- Loss of access to authors and promotions in local schools and libraries
- Reduced access to a wide range of titles (illustrated titles are particularly important to ‘try before you buy’)

We wish to add that our partners in the business of promoting literacy will be left with an impossible gulf to fill.

We, at The Little Bookroom, submit this letter in support of the detailed submissions made to you by representative organisations of which we are proud to be members, namely the Australian Booksellers Association and Leading Edge Books.

Yours Sincerely,
Leesa Lambert