

Comments on Productivity Commission Discussion Draft on PIRs

The discussion draft on the Parallel Importation of Books is the equivalent of a smiling assassin. It purports to be reasoned, even-handed and cognizant of the multiple and conflicting viewpoints on these issues. Yet it is predicated on a single article of faith: *that removing current copyright protections on Australian books is somehow necessary.*

I, and many other Australian writers, readers, publishers and book lovers, do not accept this as an article of faith.

Removing current copyright protections on Australian books threatens this country's vibrant and flourishing writing and publishing industry. The Productivity Commission acknowledges that it would diminish the earning capacity of published Australian authors and would make it more difficult for existing publishers to nurture new Australian literary talent.

So why do it? Major retailers dangle before us the 'possibility' that book prices may come down. Yet even the Commission admits that there is no guarantee this will happen across the board. It also admits to insufficient data on many key elements of the current debate. Yet despite this, the Commission is prepared to take action that will destabilise the Australian writing and publishing industry.

On a global scale, our industry is small, but at this point, it is still ours. Will the United States remove its own copyright protections on books – will the United Kingdom? - if tiny Australia falls on its literary sword? I think not.

In the face of heavy and sustained criticism of any removal of current copyright protections, the Commission's draft recommendation is for a twelve month stay-of-execution for PIRs.

Such a move would unfairly penalise authors and publishers with backlists that sell. It also penalises children's authors, illustrators and writers of young adult fiction and other books with atypical selling curves thanks to ongoing demand (eg from schools and libraries), which give their books longevity in the marketplace.

It seems to me that the Commission is floating the idea of removing current copyright protections after twelve months, so that it can say that at least it is recommending *something*.

I say it would be better if it recognised that it does not need to do *anything*.

The Australian writing and publishing industry isn't broken, so it doesn't need fixing. But if current copyright protections are removed, it could well be broke and we would all be much poorer as a consequence.

Yours sincerely

Christine Bongers