

Dear Commissioners

As both an author and a reader, I am deeply concerned about the recommendations of the Productivity Commission to remove the Parallel Importation Restrictions (PIRs) on books.

The proposed changes will negatively impact on nurturing and promoting Australian literature and our culture at large, destroy a publishing and bookseller industry employing thousands of people; and detrimentally impact on Australian creativity and diversity, with little or no change to book prices and availability of product to the Australian reader.

Negative impact on Australian literature, culture and creativity

If the recommendations are introduced it will decimate our Australian literary culture by reducing the investment by Australian publishers in the works of established and emerging Australian writers, such as myself. This will result in the reduction and/or withdrawal of copyright protections for my work and that of my fellow Australian authors, resulting in the death of our rich and diverse literary legacy and those author voices yet to emerge.

Like me, it would appear that the vast majority of Australian readers are content with current book pricing and are deeply committed to supporting new and established Australian voices, as well as their local bookstores, who are often the hub of local communities and who generously support local libraries and schools through donations, events and the promotion of literacy and reading. Much of this support is also focused on introducing young readers to books written by Australian authors.

The changes are sure to impact on the amount of Australian content taught and made available within Australian schools and the range of Australian children's books available. As the parent of four children ranging in age from 19 years to 4 years, this is of particular concern to me.

Negative impact on Australian book industry and independent bookselling businesses

The recommended changes will undoubtedly endanger one of the largest and ever growing book cultures in the world, one which employs more than 20,000 people Australia-wide.

Between the writer and the reader there are literally dozens of others: agent, publisher, copy and line editors, formatters and type setters and proof readers, printers, suppliers of paper and ink, the people in the warehouses and drivers of delivery trucks, marketeers and sales representatives, the list goes on... and of course the booksellers putting the books in the hands of the reading public.

To my great delight, the Australian book industry is thriving. It employs thousands, turns over billions of dollars each year, it doesn't ask for subsidies and contributes to the life and soul of the nation. Surely this is productivity in action!

The proposed changes will have a domino effect upon local communities throughout Australia if author and publisher protections are affected. Please don't allow this to happen.

Removing of PIRs would not lead to cheaper prices

I am yet to be convinced that the overriding push to introduce cheaper books into the Australian marketplace is based on any form of current economic modelling or indeed, any consultation with the Australian reading public or the community of booksellers they are engaged with. In fact, book prices in New Zealand, where the market has been opened since 1998, are higher, with the range of books sold having fallen and publishers' capital having been withdrawn from the market. This is not a model we should be trying to emulate.

The argument about availability and access of books does not stand as Australians can buy books from anywhere anytime under the existing Parallel Importation Restrictions. Since 2009, the Australian book industry has self-regulated, shortening the publication and availability window in this market with most of the internationally renowned authors and publications available in Australia simultaneously.

As an author and reader, I urge you to ensure the continuation of a vibrant and effective book industry by retaining the current Parallel Importation Restrictions on books.

Yours sincerely

Suzanne Leal