

# **SUBMISSION TO THE PRODUCTIVITY COMMISSION**

## **Limits of copyright**

I understand that the Government has decided not to proceed with the Commission's recommendation to limit copyright to fifteen years, but to leave the limits as they are.

This is excellent, since as a fulltime writer, my income from royalties is essential to my survival. I have over a hundred children's books published and fifteen plays which have been produced for the general public, as well as in schools. A number of my books are still producing income after twenty years from overseas markets, and my plays often have unexpected extra seasons. It generally takes years to write a play or a book, and the income from them is also spread over a number of years. Because the income for writers is generally accepted as less than \$12,000 per year, every little helps, and keeps us doing what we love, and what is important: reflecting our society back to itself.

Thank you for recognising this in your ruling.

## **Parallel Importation**

If the Commission is concerned about readers having access to cheaper copies of books, it is already true that anyone can easily buy books from overseas at the moment.

Many of my plays and some of my books are based on events in Australian history, such as the early crossings of the Blue Mountains, prominent Australian women, and colonial times. I am concerned that if parallel importation rules are relaxed, that there will be a smaller market for specifically Australian works from Australian publishers and that this will affect writers' incomes adversely.

Other countries protect their own writers by forbidding cheaper copies of their work being brought in. By proposing to open our market to cheaper overseas copies, there is less incentive for publishers to accept, promote or encourage Australian writers. This will mean that we cannot publish as much on specifically Australian topics. The implications for the wider Australian community are serious: a lack of in depth knowledge about and discussion of our Australian identity, and a specifically Australian point of view. This matters particularly in the education and children's market, my primary areas of publication, because children will not have the same opportunities to see characters like themselves in their own literature, nor will they learn about their own history and heritage as easily.

Please consider these wider issues: not just the income of writers and illustrators, but also the necessity for our citizens, students and children to see and hear strong, confident Australian voices, recognisable as such, speaking clearly about Australian matters, or universal topics in an Australian voice and from an Australian perspective.

In my very first published children's book, the American version changed a rainbow lorikeet to a hummingbird. While I love hummingbirds, I resonate to the colour, sight and sound of the raucous and indelibly Australian rainbow lorikeets, part of my childhood memories and my present bush-surrounded home. If parallel importation of books is allowed, the sound of bellbirds and lorikeets, lyre birds and magpies will become fewer and less well-known. Do we really want this?

And I wouldn't be writing poems like these:

Kookaburra swooping low

like a confident pilot coming in to land.

Millennia of experience in those feather-splayed wingtips.

Lorikeets chirrup over their day,

smoothing the sunset out of their feathers.

Do they dream also in technicolour?

### **Kookaburra**

Kookaburra barrels like a bullet through the air,

graceful as a fat-protected penguin

corkscrewing with joy the gelid depths;

as a deep-voiced whale sounding its elongated bulk

through the pillowy billows of the quilt

enclosing the seabeds of the globe;

as a pelican-galleon sailing skids to land

on solid water ruffling soft as snow.

All that almost comic kookaburra power

and short-arsed bulk

fluidifies,

powered by wings  
unfurling like a dragon's,  
riding the invisible airy  
tides and waves.

His delight

spreads ripples

through my heart,

echoed by

a silent cackle

of sheer

Australian

joy.

Rainbow lorikeets swoop through the trees.

They weave bright ribbons of sound around the house,

like acrobats echoing their moves with slow-falling lines of shiny silk.

### **Bellbird**

How my heart lifts and thrills

each time I hear a bellbird call

from the tall gums

and the groins

of the steep bush gullies.

That clear metal chime

strikes the strings of my heart

to vibrate

with an answering echo

that shakes awake the soul.

Please respect your artists.

Wendy Blaxland

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