

Parallel Importation of Books
Productivity Commission
GPO Box 1428
Canberra City ACT 2601

1st June 2016

To the Commissioners,

I write to express my overwhelming disappointment in the draft findings of the commission in their investigation into Intellectual Property Arrangements. My interest is in the area of book publishing (parallel importation) and copyright.

Books are a huge part of my life, in many different ways. I am an early childhood teacher – I read to young children every day, and I know how important Australian content is as these children learn about the world and how they fit into it. I am a children's writer, as a secondary occupation, and have myself written educational texts which sell in both the Australian and international market. One of these, part of an Aussie Aussie Aussie series, is very Australian in its content and language, and describes a major cultural event celebrated in Australia. I am a reader – I buy books regularly, and read incessantly. I am part of a book club which last year read and discussed nine books by Australian authors. And I am the mother of readers – children nearly grown who have had their childhoods enriched by so many Australian children's authors.

This culture of Australian books is not something easily measured. It appears it is not something the commission cares much about trying to understand. It goes far beyond any perceived economic benefits of stripping down parallel importation arrangements and limiting copyright periods. It speaks of our voice in the world, and the way we show children who we are and where we have come from. As a teacher, I can see it every time I read a book featuring, for example, a cockatoo, only to have the children engage in a rigorous discussion about all the cockies who surround their houses in the morning and strip the leaves from their trees. It arises when we read indigenous stories and learn about how to embrace the culture of our first people. And it is paramount when I read words that are meaningful in our own Australian English and do not need to be translated from the US equivalent.

If I put my author's hat on, I can tell you that I make little money from my writing. With a primary job as a teacher, I don't have the time to invest, and I know that as much as my earnings are appreciated, they're ridiculously hard to come by. The few titles I do have, that I OWN, I treasure. It took me a long time to make that small break into the market, and I keep spare copies on my own shelf to hand down to my children one day. My books are MY WORK, and I expect to own them for my lifetime. I cannot believe that my work would be regarded differently from someone who has perhaps invested their efforts/time/money in real estate, and expects that they may continue to receive rent until they sell their property on.

And as a reader? A buyer of books? Of course I expect to pay for books – to do so is not a burden for consumers. It is an expectation, and a fair one. As with other

products within the wide commercial market place, consumers pay for what they use. And if they can't pay, they can use our amazing public libraries and not miss out at all.

If we remove parallel importation restrictions, we DO risk our industry and, more importantly, our cultural expression. The big markets of the world, especially the US and UK, continue to have their own parallel importation rules. Why would we choose to unlevel this playing field?

I love books, and Australian ones have a special place in my heart. I hope that the Productivity Commission can listen to the voices of passion AND reason, and recognise that the survival of our marketplace is about much more than numbers. I urge the commission to take the time to more widely consider the consequences of removing parallel importation restrictions on books. The realities of price are such a small part of this equation, and what we gain in dollars (if indeed we do!) could be so little compared to what we lose in quality.

This is too important to mess with.

Yours Sincerely,

Kim Rackham (Smyth)
(teacher, reader, parent, buyer of books, part-time author.)