

I am writing as both a bookseller and a consumer of books to register my concern about the Productivity Commission's recommendations to lift restrictions on the parallel importation of books.

Territorial copyright is an essential part of the publishing industry worldwide, and thus an essential part of cultural life. Removing Australian publishers' capacity to profit from local editions of overseas titles (for example, Bloomsbury Australia's editions of Harry Potter) would remove their ability to invest in Australian writers, particularly emerging Australian writers, who typically sell smaller volumes in this market than international bestsellers. Without this stream of revenue, publishing in Australia will become unsustainable, and publishers here would be unable to foster and support Australian writing – which they currently do to the tune of \$120 million each year – and thus, fewer Australian books would be published and fewer Australian stories told.

The Commission has recommended that Australian writing be subsidised by government, but given the recent cuts to the arts sector, it is hard to imagine that \$120 million would be forthcoming. Further, is it right, in a democratic nation, that the government should have a hand in determining what writing is published, what voices are heard? Territorial copyright has enabled Australian publishing to make locally-produced literature profitable without government intervention or subsidies. The Commission has not produced compelling arguments for interfering with this successful model.

We only have to look to our neighbours in New Zealand to see that an open market has disastrous effects on domestic publishing. Allowing overseas publishers to freely profit from domestic consumers has gutted New Zealand's publishing industry, costing jobs, closing publishers and bookshops, and reducing the number of authors in New Zealand who might hope to be published, much less make a living from their writing. The 2016 winner of the Ockham New Zealand Book Awards, Stephen Daisley, is not published in his home territory. His award-winning novel is published by Text Publishing, an Australian independent publisher that would not be sustainable if it were to lose its territorial copyrights. Without territorial copyright, New Zealand cannot sustain its own writers, even those venerable enough to win major literary prizes. Do we want Australian writing to go the same way?

The Commission suggests that books will become cheaper for the consumer, but there is no evidence in the report that that will be the case. In Australia, booksellers and publishers have been responsive to consumer demands for cheaper books, and average retail prices have fallen by 25% since 2008 under our protected market (by contrast, book prices in New Zealand's open market have fallen only 14% in that time).

For independent bookshops and chains, importing books is costly (particularly with the Australian dollar where it currently is), and sends profits out of Australia only to return international editions at the same or similar retail price as the local edition. Small bookshops and even medium-sized chains in Australia do not have the buying or bargaining power to negotiate with offshore suppliers for the terms of trade that would be required to make importation profitable. In terms of lowering the unit price on books, the only stakeholders who stand to benefit are large international companies, like Amazon, who will be able to freely flood our market with remaindered overseas books. With only detriment to businesses owned and operated in Australia, enacting the Commission's recommendations will be disastrous.

Transferring profits offshore in this way is a huge and needless blow to Australian business and jobs, in publishing, bookselling, and for authors themselves. Ultimately, these recommendations will silence Australian voices and demolish Australia's currently self-sustaining, \$2 billion publishing industry. The government must defend Australia's thriving and profitable publishing industry, as well as the 20,000 employed by the broader book industry in Australia, and Australia's authors, who tell our stories, explore our history, and reflect our lives back to us on the page in ways that only home-grown artists can.

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