

I wish to express my grave concerns about **the Productivity Commission's proposed changes to copyright laws in Australia**. As an author of children's literature, a freelance writer, and an active member of the writing profession and community, I fear that the proposed changes will seriously reduce opportunities for new Australian talent to emerge and drastically affect my ability to earn a living from my writing now and later in life.

Copyright Wrongs

The notion of "fair use" is categorically unfair. If the Productivity Commission's changes are taken up, Australian authors' income will suffer dramatically. When similar rules were changed in Canada, the cost to writers and the publishing industry was calculated to be in the area of \$30 million since 2012.

Australian law sets out a series of clear exceptions to copyright restrictions known as 'fair dealing'. What we have now *is* fair, a small fee paid to publishers and authors to allow for copying sections of their work without seeking permission. These payments, though small, mean so much to Australian authors, whose incomes average about \$13,000 per year.

Death Blow to Australian Publishing

A **change to parallel importation rules** is unnecessary and unhelpful. If the current rules are abandoned, booksellers will be able to buy bulk from anywhere in the world, which will undermine the Australian publishing industry, as it has in New Zealand. Cheap imports are likely to contain American spelling, grammar and content, thrusting the Australian voice and culture still further into the background.

The Australian book industry is flourishing, producing 7000 new books a year and generating around \$2 billion in revenue. This productivity is the result of the current rules, which help publishers manage risk and support the creation of new Australian stories.

Bookstores may argue that these changes will help them competitively, but the cost is far too high. Any increases in commerce gained would come at the price of our Australian spirit.

Australian Identity at Stake

The potential damage that would be caused by changing the PIR doesn't stop with financial hardship for creators. By disregarding (i.e., not protecting) Australian literature and publishing, the Australian identity takes another blow. Instead of reading books that project the unique and precious Aussie voice and spirit, our citizens—young and old—will have to ingest still more American culture.

I say this as a citizen of dual-nationality (Australian-American). Every American book, TV show, song, clip, and movie chips away at the very things that make Australia special. As water carves stone, this cultural tide slowly wears away our Aussiness.

It's important for our children to read Aussie books about the history of our Aboriginal ancestors of 20,000 years ago. Our kids should delight in stories about brolgas and spotted quolls, pademelons and quokkas. These creatures are (sadly) unlikely to make their way into American picture books. Australian school kids need stories that feature tuckshop queues not school cafeteria lines.

When I arrived in Australia nearly three decades ago, I met Aussies with accents so broad I needed an interpreter. People said delightful things like "crikey" and "dunny" and "dinky di". My husband introduced me as his "cheese and kisses". Colourful Aussie-isms seasoned people's everyday speech. These days, lots of Aussies (especially city folks) cringe at these sayings, and I think that's a pity.

Further information from reliable sources about how these changes would affect Australia's books and authors can be found on the following links:

www.asauthors.org/copyright-under-threat
<http://bookscreateaustralia.com.au>

I've written to my Member of Parliament, the Hon. Mr Peter Dutton, urging him to reject the Productivity Commission's proposed changes to copyright law and instead to support our Australian writers and publishers, who through their craft shape, promote, and preserve Australian identity and culture.

Kind regards,

Alison Stegert
Author, Freelance Writer & Blogger
w: www.ali-stegert.com

Member:

Australian Society of Authors (ASA)
Society of Children's Book Writers & Illustrators (SCBWI), Regional Officer
Book Links, QLD, Committee Member
Write Links, QLD

Supporter:

Children's Book Council of Australia
The Pyjama Foundation