

I am an Australian writer. Since 1996, I have invested all my professional time and energies in producing a body of work that reflects Australian experiences. Every piece of 'Intellectual property' that I have created has been made, painstakingly, over the course of many years.

Draft Finding 4.2 of the Productivity Commission's report – that copyright should be reduced to 15-25 years after creation will immediately slash my income along with the income of countless other Australian authors. The proposed changes to copyright law would destroy my ability to write full-time. My output would become a trickle and I would approach retirement with little to support my old age, as would be the case for many Australian authors. Copyright is our superannuation and the proposals of the Productivity Commission would rob us of the fruits of our labours.

Removal of existing parallel import restrictions on books, as proposed by the Productivity Commission, would undermine the Australian publishing industry. The suggestion that subsidies and prizes could compensate for the 'chill on local writing' is naïve. No amount of increased subsidy from government could compensate for a weaker publishing industry.

As both a recipient of Australia Council grants and a Peer Assessor, I know first-hand that grants are not a substitute for royalties. Nor can prizes compensate for an unstable publishing industry. Though I have won a number of literary prizes, prizes are like lottery tickets. No one can build a career on the off-chance that their work will win a prize. Many significant authors, whose work has made a solid contribution to our cultural landscape, have never won a prize.

The rise of Australian publishing since the 1970s, which has largely been possible thanks to restrictions on parallel importation of books, has created a climate that has allowed Australian writers to live and work in their own country, without having to pursue foreign publishers and markets. It has ended the tyranny of distance and stemmed the tide of expatriate writers who were obliged to leave Australia to make a living. It has allowed diverse Australian voices to be read and appreciated. It has made it possible to make a living from writing stories about our people and our culture. Removing the restrictions would throw Australian creators into markets that are utterly indifferent to our culture.

In 2010, my novel for young adults 'India Dark' which is set in Australia, South Asia and India, was sent to American publishing houses for consideration. One US publisher suggested that the setting should be changed from Melbourne to San Francisco. Their argument was that no American reader would be interested in reading a novel where 'exotic meets exotic'. (ie Australia meets India). For American readers to engage with the story, the publisher believed Australia needed to be factored out of the narrative.

The book won the NSW Premier's History Prize for Young People's Fiction in 2011. It was eventually published in the UK and India but, as with all my historical fiction, its most important readership remains Australian. I wrote the novel about young Australians for young Australian readers.

For authors of authentic Australian stories that feature no events nor characters that anchor them to events in the USA, UK or other countries, our stories will be at risk if cut adrift from a viable Australian publishing industry.

Kirsty Murray – 2nd June, 2016