

To Whom It May Concern

I write as someone who is passionate about children's books and have been involved in working in librarianship, bookselling and publishing for over fifty years. In all this time I have been involved with the Children's Book Council of Australia and am now Deputy Chair of the National Board of that organisation. The CBCA actively promotes reading to raise literacy standards in Australia and to support and encourage authors, illustrators and publishers of Australian books for children. That Australian children's books provide over thirty per cent of the total book trade is a magnificent achievement and a significant contribution to the Australian economy.

Authors and illustrators earn a pittance in royalties on their books and it's a wonder that so many of them continue in this industry. It's obviously because they are so committed to their young readers. To reduce their term of copyright is not only morally reprehensible but would make a career in books unsustainable. That their books would compete with copies of foreign editions flooding the market would kill the chances of their local editions to succeed.

I recently had the exciting experience of having my first picture book published in Australia and in the US (where it was a bestseller) so I can now speak as an author as well. Cultural imperialism of the US is so powerful, as is clearly evident in the TV and motion picture industry, that it is even more important that in our literary culture we remain independent. For example, with parallel importation it's possible that if my book were to be remaindered in the US it could be sold in Australia with 'Mum' spelt as 'Mom'. This may appear to be a minor point but it exemplifies the possibility of Australian culture being swamped.

As Thomas Keneally said in his submission, 'books are not toothbrushes'. At the very least, I believe that the arts should be separated from patents and looked at as the unique field that they are. If it is the government's aim to have no manufacturing in Australia and import all our goods, it may well be a road to economic disaster, but the Australian psyche will not be damaged by using only imported toothbrushes. Destroying the Australian book industry, as evidenced by the New Zealand experience, will significantly damage not only the economy, but the welfare of citizens growing up without a culture of their own.

Please make it possible for authors and illustrators to make a reasonable living out of their work. Otherwise the publishing industry might as well close down, like the car manufacturing industry and others.

Yours sincerely

Margaret Hamilton AM