

As an Australian writer I am writing to you to express my objections to the recommendations made by the Productivity Commission in your recent draft report on Intellectual Property Arrangements.

If the draft Productivity Commission Report is adopted, Australian authors will lose significant income. As a professional creator of ten published books, my already precarious income will suffer from your recommended changes to copyright and the lifting of restrictions on parallel imports - recommendations which speciously purport to encourage innovation in this country.

Your recommendations could also cause many of Australia's fine small publishing houses to founder.

Writers are the most significant people in the publishing chain, yet as primary producers, we are the equivalent of cows in the dairy industry. Like cows, we are expected to eat grass. But the Productivity Commission, it would appear, now considers that grass is too good for us. We should eat dirt instead.

Authors labour for years or decades to create books in return for very little remuneration. Vast numbers of people, meanwhile, make their livings from our creative products. As a children's writer, I receive only 5% royalties. To eke out a meagre income of \$50,000 pa from my writing I would need to sell half a million books a year. Given that Australia's population is only 24 million, earning a subsistence living from writing is all but impossible.

It is all very well for the Government to argue that writers write for the love of it and do not expect remuneration since they are performing a community service. That argument would only be valid if writers' mortgage lenders, plumbers, mechanics, dentists, communications providers, computer and stationery retailers, food providers and other service utilities did not require writers to pay them for their products or services either, because they too wanted to perform a community service. And if writers are required to write for free because they are dedicated to performing a community service, so should politicians work for free. And public servants.

I have continued to write for twenty-years in the hope that the more books I have published, the more royalties I will accrue in old age, and that my writing income might eventually lift me above the level of the aged pension. Yet the Productivity Commission now wants to put time restrictions on my copyright which could abolish all my writing income in my old age. This is manifestly UNFAIR to me and to other Australian authors.

Allowing parallel imports of cheaper overseas editions to undermine Australian editions of books is also manifestly UNFAIR to Australian authors and publishers.

For the Australian Government to threaten Australian authors and Australian publishing businesses in this way is pure philistinism.

According to the Intellectual Property Arrangement Report's own terms of reference, innovation is to be encouraged for the sake of the nation's economy. Rather than undermining Australian authors' already paltry income streams, the Government must develop strategies to bolster our incomes - for economic reasons alone, because for every single dollar of income I make from a book with a retail price of \$20, this means I am creating \$19 of wealth for Australian illustrators, publishers, printers, bookshops and couriers.

Be assured that Australian buyers are prepared to pay for quality products if they know that they are supporting a home grown industry.

Australian books make a difference. They are more than commodities or 'widgets'. They tell our stories, and define and educate our nation in non-didactic ways. Australian books are at the very heart of what it means to be Australian. If parallel import restrictions are lifted in the interests of facilitating global capitalism, this country will be flooded with cheap, crass commercial overseas titles and we will lose all that is clever, innovative and distinctive about Australian literature.

The Productivity Commission's draft recommendations on intellectual property are NOT the way forward for us to become the clever country. The way forward is to invest in literature the way the Australian Government invests in elite sports. And the good thing about investing in writing is that writing can be a lifelong career – not like elite sport, where most athletes are forced to retire by the age of thirty.

Thank you for the opportunity to make this submission. I hope that the Productivity Commission will reconsider the recommendations of this draft report, which could sound the death knell for this Australian publishing industry.

Yours sincerely

Dr Anne Morgan

www.annemorgan.com.au