

03 June 2016

Dear Sir/Madam

As an author, teacher and parent I am very concerned about the recommendations outlined by the Productivity Commission and believe that any changes to the current system will result in terribly negative consequences for Australian literature.

I am an internationally published children's author and can attest to the changes that are made to texts when they are published overseas. In my instance, the word 'bok choy' in the Australian edition of BLOW ME A KISS was replaced with 'lettuce' in the American edition, without consultation with me, the author. This might seem minor however it is just one small example of how Australian life, culture and experience would be Americanised and homogenised if parallel import restrictions were lifted. Most children in Australia know what 'bok choy' is because the vegetable is clearly present in our supermarkets and this book was written to reflect Australian culture. My 500-word picture book loses some of its relevance purely by the change of one word. If the small press publisher who printed BLOW ME A KISS had to compete with larger overseas publishers importing the American version, I know the Australian edition would be the first to suffer.

As a teacher and parent, I'm passionate about excellent Australian literature in the classroom. From the spelling presented (mum/mom) to the experiences shared (playing American Football as opposed to AFL/NRL) our children will not be able to see themselves reflected in books if these changes go ahead. I don't want to read the American version of Australian stories to the children in my care when we have a functioning, passionate and hard-working industry here in Australia that deserves to be supported and protected, not hung out to dry.

I do my best to add to the family income by pursuing my writing, however meagre that income may be. I don't even come close to the reported \$13,000 per annum income of the average writer and have only once in the last five years earned over \$1,000 in royalties. It's clear that I could not live on the income my writing generates but this is not because I don't aspire to! To say writers don't write for money is wrong. The financial remuneration is only one aspect of why I write but it is a valid, reasonable expectation to be paid for my expertise and work. And rather than my current low earnings being a reason to open the flood gates for overseas giants to devour our local industry, it should be a call for greater protection, greater support, greater investment because I – and many others – are just starting out on this journey.

I hope my journey is going to be long one which results in many, many top quality children's books being published in the years to come. I hope I win a Children's Book of the Year award one day. I hope that my stories are read and re-read in houses all across Australia as children and families see themselves and their stories reflected in my words. And throughout that, I hope my income rises over time to the point where I am writing full-time and supporting my family, but I fear that if these proposed changes go ahead, my journey will be exceptionally short. As an emerging author with a

publishing track record (including making the 2016 Notable Books for Early Readers list from the Children's Book Council of Australia), I am the kind of writer that an Australian publisher is willing to take a risk on in the current market. If you remove the safeguards and allow parallel importation of books from overseas, I am precisely the kind of writer that publishers will not be able to sign because the risk is too great. And how else does one become the next Mem Fox or Wendy Orr or Gabrielle Wang or Pamela Allen or Bruce Whatley or Jackie French if the business climate is such that publishers simply cannot take a risk on a new and promising author?

We writers are not asking for handouts or for someone to make it easy for us. What we are asking for is that our industry be treated fairly because without us and our stories our entire nation loses, especially our kids. Australian stories are important. Australian authors and illustrators are important. The Australian voice is important. Please don't strip away the very heart of this vibrant, shrewd, innovative industry that provides so much to so many.

Yours sincerely

Karen Collum

Author of:

SAMUEL'S KISSES/BLOW ME A KISS, 2010, New Frontier Publishing

SMALL AND BIG, 2015, Windy Hollow Press