

3 June 2016

Submission to Productivity Commission, Intellectual Property Arrangements

I am an Australian author of Middle Grade books; I also have a first class honours degree in economics and 25 years' corporate experience, so hopefully I can add something to this debate.

Much of the criticism of the proposed changes to parallel imports will be covered in other submissions, so I will keep mine short and to the point by means of anecdote.

I have been fortunate enough to have sold the rights to my series (about a teenage Australian boy) to multiple countries, including the United States.

The cultural risk posed by allowing unrestricted imports of foreign editions of Australian books goes well beyond a few quirks in spelling. Yes, it will be ludicrous for an Australian child to have to decipher an Australian character who says: 'Last Fall, my mom told me to keep off the pavement by Sydney Harbor because my bangs were so long I might trip.' But the cultural impact of being force-fed US idiom is only one aspect of this debate. Our nation runs the risk of being force-fed US values as well.

Let me tell you a story. My first book, *The Billionaire's Curse*, was subject to a re-edit in the United States between the hardback and the paperback editions. The US publisher received complaints that my characters used language and attitudes that did not accord with a certain notion of how a child should interact with adults. Now, the language and attitude shown by my characters, when seen by an Australian reader, would raise no issues here at all. They were fresh and to the point: that is how we are as a nation. But to the conservatives in the US, they were repugnant. So for the paperback edition, the offending passages were changed. The book was effectively culturally censored. And if the parallel import restrictions are lifted, that is the edition that would come into the Australian market—an edition that has been expressly and purposely stripped of that which makes it Australian.

If this can happen to me, it can happen to any Australian author.

This is the risk we face if these proposed changes go through. We, as Australians, will lose control of our stories, and with it, our sense of self. We will have outsourced the ongoing formation of our national character to a foreign country that has a tin ear to our cultural heritage.

The loss of our stories is too high a price to pay in the hope that consumers can possibly, maybe, save a dollar on the cover price of an imported book. And the economic case to support a drop in cover price is weak, at best. The New Zealand experience alone is evidence of that.

Putting my economics hat on, how should a rent-maximising Australian author respond to changes in PIR? All the economic incentives would be to stop writing about

Australian characters in Australian settings and instead write books exclusively for the US market.

At a time in our history when it has never been so exciting to be an Australian, apparently, it seems absurd for the Federal Government to actively degrade what it is to be a citizen of this country. Our creative industries are just as innovative and forward-looking as any other mainstay of the local economy. Why sacrifice them in pursuit of an efficiency that is not there to be gained? There is no valid economic or cultural case to proceed: the proposed changes fail on both counts.

Kind regards

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Brisbane.