

Andy Griffiths

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To whom it may concern

I am writing to express my concern about the recommendation to remove the Parallel Importation Rules (PIR) in the recent draft report into intellectual property arrangements in Australia.

I am an Australian children's author and had my first book published in 1993. Since then I have written more than 30 books which have sold over 7 million copies in 24 countries.

I have never believed that the world owes me a living as a writer and have never sought or received a grant from any funding body. Before I had my first book published I undertook many thousands of hours of unpaid writing practice, completed a number of writing courses and spent two years writing full time, all fully funded by my own savings.

I am very happy to acknowledge, however, the enormous support I have received from my Australian publisher, Pan Macmillan, from the beginning of my career up to the present day.

Pan Macmillan's belief in the value of touring their authors as a slow but sure means of developing an audience has been the making of me as a writer. As well as funding large marketing campaigns, they have organised a national tour for every book I have published with them since 1998—often two (and sometimes three!) tours in a single year, as well as contributing to the cost of my attendance at countless writing festivals around the country.

A typical promotional book tour can last anywhere between two to five weeks. It involves talks and signings at bookshops, libraries and schools in all capital cities and many major regional centres. Pan Macmillan undertakes the full funding of the planning, travel and hotel costs as well as providing a full-time publicist for the entire length of the tour.

In the early years of my career, in the late 1990s and early 2000s, bookshop appearances would attract a small number of readers, and would only result in a relatively modest number of book sales. These early tours were undertaken by both Pan Macmillan and myself with the view to the longer term and would definitely have cost the company more than it received in book sales.

These tours, however, were invaluable in allowing me to establish personal relationships with booksellers across the country, and to hear first-hand about their experiences selling books in general, and my books specifically. As a result of these interactions with both booksellers and readers, I was able to continually

hone my craft as a writer and presenter. I believe this ‘conversation’ between myself, the reader and booksellers/librarians/teachers and parents has been crucial to my development as a writer and would not have been possible without Pan Macmillan’s long-term investment in my career.

The results of this long-term investment have been that, along with illustrator/co-writer Terry Denton and editor/co-writer Jill Griffiths, I have been able to create books that communicate powerfully to a very large readership.

Last year, the fifth book in our Treehouse series, *The 65-Storey Treehouse* was not only the fastest-selling Australian book in a decade but also the bestselling book in any category in Australia. At book signings around the country we were overwhelmed with readers, resulting in signing queues that lasted for 3 to 5 hours almost every day for four weeks. To date the series has sold well over 2 million copies locally and over a million internationally.

This didn’t happen overnight ... it happened over 18 years and, I hope, serves to illustrate the extraordinary results that can be gained from long-term investment in local authors.

Until the Treehouse series, my books had relatively limited success in other countries and were rarely translated. But the Treehouse series has now been sold into 24 countries and is already a bestselling series in Norway, Holland and Korea. Last month it debuted on the *New York Times* bestsellers list. This is obviously all very welcome news and confirmation of what I have long believed: that Australian authors are capable of producing books the equal of any in the world.

This could be a mixed blessing, however, if PIRs are scrapped. As I hope I made clear in the early part of this submission, I’m not looking for an easy ride for either myself or my publisher, but I am most definitely looking for a level playing field.

I want local publishers to be able to confidently invest in local authors without the possibility that if these authors are subsequently published overseas that these overseas editions—often produced at a much lower unit cost because they are printed in larger quantities due to these countries having larger populations—would then be available for Australian booksellers to import in large quantities to compete with local editions.

I believe that in effect this will undermine the returns to the Australian publishers who took the financial risk of helping to develop the books in the first place. It seems to me that the ultimate effect of this will be to make investment in new Australian authors less attractive and, at the very least, mean a vast reduction in the amount of money that publishing companies have available to take a chance on new Australian talent or to create opportunities to bring authors and readers/booksellers/librarians together.

I don't think it is well understood that publishing is a highly speculative enterprise. Often it is not clear which books will sell until they are actually published. As a result, many books do not even earn back the advance that the publisher pays the author and it's the relatively few books that do very well that allow the publisher to absorb these losses and operate at a profit.

I also don't believe that book consumers are driven solely by price. As a book consumer I don't like to pay more for books than strictly necessary, but not at any cost, not if it means threatening Australian bookshops and the ongoing incentive for Australian publishers to make a long-term investment in publishing and growing Australian authors. (And it's not as if the consumer does not have a choice already—my and many other books are readily available at heavily discounted prices from book and department stores.)

Leading bookseller Mark Rubbo says in the June 2016 edition of *Readings Monthly*, 'If bookshops are to survive they need to be places that people feel a connection to and want to spend time in. They need to be what the American sociologist Ray Oldenburg described as the 'third place': they must be 'anchors' of community life that facilitate and foster broader, more creative interaction.'

And one of the most powerful ways for bookshops to facilitate this creative interaction is to have regular author events ... for which they rely on publishers with the resources and incentive to invest in publishing and promoting local authors.

Australia is a relatively small market which means print runs are correspondingly smaller and unit costs per book higher. If we are to keep a level playing field and give Australian publishers and emerging writers a fair chance to compete with the best in the world we need the PIR to remain in force.

As a child I was lucky enough to have a book shelf filled with great books from all around the world, but Australian children's classics such as *The Magic Pudding* and *Coles Funny Pictures Books* had a special resonance and spoke to me in a way that was unmistakably Australian. Knowing that the authors were Australian made the dream of being a writer seem just that little bit more attainable.

Today, a child can pay me no higher compliment than to tell me that I have inspired them to want to be a writer too.

We need books produced in Australia so children don't grow up thinking that writing is something that happens in other parts of the world and we Australians merely consume it.

Why threaten a system that is working well and allowing Australian authors to compete on the world stage when it is not clear that the desired outcome (cheaper books for Australian consumers) is even guaranteed?

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