

I write as a published Australian author of thirty-five children's books in response to the Productivity Commission's draft report, released on April 29, to urge the retention of current parallel importation restrictions on books and the current copyright protection for creators.

Publication of Australian books featuring our language, landscapes and characters are crucial to maintaining our cultural heritage and enabling our children to connect with place, language and the unique differences offered by our culture and continent.

Abolition of the current parallel import restrictions will result in a flood of American publications denying our children the opportunity to learn through texts they can relate to or see themselves in a global context. Mum will become Mom, petrol will change to gasoline etc. More worryingly, US educational literature is highly prescriptive and censorial to the point they will distort nature and historical accuracy in an effort to protect cultural "sensibilities". ie. removal of udders from cows in school resource materials and adding full clothing to Ancient Egyptians. I implore the Productivity Commission to consider, is this type of education and literary heritage we want for our children?

The UK and United States do not allow parallel importation in order to protect their publishing industries and authors, which makes me question why lifting restrictions would even be considered here when the likely outcome is the devastation of our small but very vital publishing industry and the erosion of our unique culture.

The abolition of restrictions New Zealand has devastated their publishing industry, resulting in a 35% downturn in the range of titles sold and the closure of many of their publishing houses and bookshops.

In a country where our own literacy and grammar standards are shown to be sliding, why would any move be made to increase this problem further by lifting PIRs, which will result in less representation of Australian material both fiction and non-fiction in our schools and on our bookshop shelves?

I fear a competing glut of overseas publications would force Australian publishers to close their books to submissions from any but well-known authors. Many Australian authors must already supplement their writing income by working two jobs. Further reductions in royalties and publishing opportunities will mean few, if any, Australian writers will be able to financially pursue their craft and careers and much emerging and existing talent will be lost to the industry.

As for the claim that Australian "writers rarely write for financial reasons," what rubbish. Of course, we write for a living, though our financial return is not often compensatory to the labour or hours worked. How many writers, whether fiction, academic, historian or biographer would spend years writing and researching a work of length to only own their copyright, and potentially earn royalties on the thousands of hours spent, for a brief five years? None that I know. Because writers do write for financial reasons. We're not all starving in a garret and accepting our lot for the sake of our art as suggested.

I also wish to strongly refute the Productivity Commission assertion that most literary works have a commercial value of only five years. Twenty of my titles are over ten-years old and still constitute an ongoing and major portion of my writing income. If copyright was to

extend to a mere five years every one of those titles would now most likely no longer serve as part of my income.

As an author and avid reader I strongly urge the Commission to retain the current parallel importation restrictions and 'fair dealing' of Australian territorial copyright on books so that our creators, publishers and booksellers can continue to provide books that reflect our culture, landscape and language to this and future generations of Australians.

Chris Bell  
Author