

Submission to Productivity Commission

Paula Weston (author of THE REPHAIM series, published with Text Publishing, Melbourne)

I'm an internationally published Australian author writing to oppose the Australian Government's proposed changes to parallel importation restrictions.

I work a full-time job and write fiction as a 'side job'. I write because I love it. I write stories with a strong Australian flavour because I love Australia. I also love that we have a local writing industry that supports and nurtures local writers.

My young adult series was first contracted here in Australia in 2011, and then on-sold to publishers in the territories of North America, United Kingdom and Turkey.

Under the proposed changes, the international editions of my books could end up on Australian shelves because they are "cheaper". The problem with that outcome is that the international editions of my work are often edited to make them less Australian.

It's only a word here or there to help readers unfamiliar with Australian terms, but it robs the books of their 'Australian-ness'. That's annoying enough in a foreign marketplace but the thought those international editions might end up in the hands of Australian readers (rather than the local editions) is both disheartening and incredibly frustrating.

For Australian young adult readers in particular it's important for them to hear themselves in their own books. They are already saturated with North American culture in particular. Under the proposed changes, the Australian stories they read may no longer reflect their language and culture because of the promise those books will be cheaper. How can our national identity and cultural representation in literature *not* be diminished under such a system?

It's been well documented that removing parallel importation restrictions will cripple the \$2 billion Australian publishing industry because we will no longer be competing on a level playing field.

This change might make sense if the entire publishing world was doing the same thing at the same time. But they're not. This significantly disadvantages Australian writers and their publishers because local editions of books are no longer guaranteed first right to be sold in Australian bookstores.

Australian Society of Authors, the Australian Booksellers Association, Australian Publishers Association, Australian Literary Agents' Association and the Print Industry Association of Australia state that the Australian publishing industry provides more than 20,000 local jobs in a \$2 billion industry.

Would the federal government risk any other industry of that size and value with these types of changes? Especially when there are already measures in place that allow international editions of books to be imported and sold if local publishers fail to deliver

locally printed books with 30 days of publication (noting the industry standard in Australia is actually 14 days).

The narrow-minded and simplified sales pitch of “cheaper books” might work have public appeal now, but what happens when we no longer have Australian voices on Australian bookshelves? We already talk about the struggle with national identity. How much more difficult is that when we rob our creative industries of space to be heard?

There is the argument that the Australian Government will take on the role publishers are currently playing by supporting great Australian writing through subsidised writing prizes and education schemes.

Recent cuts to creative funding in this country indicate that this type of funding will rise and fall depending on which party is in power, and it’s highly unlikely a future Australian Government will have the inclination to make (let alone increase) such investment in tough economic times.

Already, I need a full-time job to supplement my writing. Please don’t make it any more difficult for Australian writers to earn a living. There are not enough of us now, and that number is only going to dwindle if we make it even more difficult for writers to build and sustain creative careers in this country. For local writers to emerge and thrive, we need a robust local publishing industry.

Minister for the Arts Mitch Field said it best on 24 May 2016: “Copyright protection is an essential mechanism for ensuring the viability and success of creative industries by incentivising and rewarding creators.”