

I'm an Australian author writing to express my grave concern about the Productivity Commission recommending the Government remove import restrictions on books. I understand that the PC's selling point is that it would potentially lower prices and should deliver net benefits to the community.

The delivery of *net* benefits to a community does not necessarily go hand in hand with *benefits* to a community.

Allowing parallel imports would make it harder to invest in Australian authors, so there would be less diversity and fewer Australian titles. In such a dire industry future, publishers are not going to be in the position to take a chance on a manuscript such as my first novel, *Looking For Alibrandi*. In the late 80's, I was an unpublished young writer from the inner-west of Sydney who had something to say about cultural identity and growing up in this country. At the time, a handful of publishers could see the potential, but even back then it was a chore to find a publisher who could financially take a chance on an unknown writer. When I finally secured a publisher, she wrote to tell me that what I had written was important, and that if I was willing to work hard on the edit, people could still be talking about the novel in years to come. That was over twenty three years ago. My novels are still taught in schools today, both here and overseas. They've been published in over twenty countries and have given me an opportunity to continue my career both here and overseas.

What today's publishing industry does is ensure that the Australian identity is preserved, and showcased internationally.

The success of my first novel has impacted on other areas of the arts and identity in this country. In the year 2000 a film version of *Looking for Alibrandi* was released. The film premiered at an independent cinema in Norton Street Leichhardt. The film's after party was held at the Leichhardt Town Hall. Grass roots stuff. I remember the evening vividly with family and friends mingling with actors and celebrities and musicians and politicians. A friend pointed out to me that every person in the room was there because of something I did. Because of a novel written by an Australian author. At the time, Norton Street was home to three independent bookstores, and now only one is left. Under the PC's recommendations, what future does that independent bookshop have?

Our writers, publishers, our booksellers, our printers, and those who distribute our books from warehouses, and many more, are employed because we have a unique Australian book industry. If we're fortunate, and a movie is made based of an Australian book, hundreds more are employed.

In the long run, the PC's recommendations adversely affect my daughter and my nephews and my goddaughters and my young cousins. If these copyright rules are changed, kids today are back in a world similar to the one I grew up in; reading novels about places over *there*, but needing something more. I wrote *Looking For Alibrandi* from a selfish place. I wanted to see *me* on the pages of a book, because I loved reading and I loved film, but I never felt that I counted outside my extended family and my high school friends. I wanted to be part of a bigger identity. People of all ages, all cultures and all religions write to me weekly to let me know about the impact my work has had on them.

The PC draft report also recommends reducing copyright from 70 years after an author's death, to 15-25 years after the creation of the work. That means anyone, anywhere in the world can produce their own versions of classics such as *Schindler's List*, *Animalia*, *Oscar and Lucinda*, *Obernewtyn*, *Tomorrow When the War began*, just to name a few. If the PC's recommendation goes ahead my own novel will already be out of copyright.

Authors have the right to decide if, when and how their work is made public.

Furthermore there is no guarantee that books will be cheaper if PIRs are removed. This was not the case in New Zealand. A publishing industry so close to home has lost many of its local and global publishing houses and as a result, fewer NZ authors have been published. Educational publishing has also been devastated in Canada. When that happens in Australia, far fewer high-quality, local educational resources vital to our curricula will be produced. The PC's recommendations will not just impact our publishing industry, but on education, film and society as a whole.

In what way is this delivering benefits to our community?

As Peter Carey, Thomas Keneally and Richard Flanagan have said, “The book industry is not a protected industry. We are not asking for money, or for a subsidy. We are asking for the same rules and intellectual property rights that prevail for writers and book publishers in the USA, in Britain, in Europe.”

Yours sincerely

Melina Marchetta