

I wish to voice my opposition to the proposed changes by the Productivity Commission on PIRs and copyright.

Books have always been important to me personally, and in my work as an academic teaching in a university English department. In the past 6 years, I have published three books in Australia, a poetry collection with an Adelaide-based publisher (Wakefield Press); a collection of essays with a small Adelaide-based publisher (ATF Press) and a novel with HarperCollins, with contracts for two more. My experience has been that both the small and the large publishers work hard, and long hours, to bring Australian-produced books to the public.

In terms of PIRs, there is no clear evidence that such changes would benefit Australia. When such changes were introduced in New Zealand, production of books fell by 35% and Canada was similarly impacted. New Zealand writers are finding, with fewer publishing houses now in existence, they must turn to Australia for publication.

That writers earn, on average, far less than the average, is well known (less than \$13,000 per annum). The Commission's argument that for most writers, writing is a hobby and they have full or part-time jobs to earn a living, is fallacious reasoning. Published writers (and those who hope to be published) take their writing very seriously and many, if not most, would write full-time if it were at all possible; it is far more than a hobby. Instead of using the low income of authors as an excuse to further restrict the industry, the government, in line with its policies of innovation, needs to be doing all it can to encourage its growth. PIRs will not do this.

Similarly, the proposed changes to copyright are a backward step, and it is beyond belief that any other product would cease to belong to its producer after 5 years. It is the nature of books that they can have long lives, way beyond their publication date. As is clearly evident with some well-known children's books and some Australian classics, they live on well beyond five years, and in fact move from generation to generation, and are also transformed into other forms, such as plays and audio books.

The Productivity Commission's attitude to the publishing industry fails to recognise the nature of the creative arts as much more than a factory turning out toothbrushes, and the creators of books as more than workers whose value can be assessed purely in terms of numbers. In assessing the viability of the report, I suggest that we need to recognise that the balancing of numbers and accounts is not the only measure.

Creativity, in this case, the writing of books, is essential to the the quality of our lives, and that is a quality that cannot be judged by figures. As a country we need ideas. How can we think of innovation without creativity and ideas? And how can we understand ourselves as a democracy without encouraging a range of voices? Perhaps these concepts are not in the ambit of the Productivity Commission; I don't know. But they must be present in any assessment of its conclusions.