

January 16th 2009

Re Parallel Importation
The Productivity Commission,
GPO Box 1428
Canberra City, ACT 2601

Dear Commissioners,

I am a writer of books about education. While they might have some universal application in that the ways students are encouraged to learn can be considered globally, my books have been about the development of specific approaches to schooling and education – very different things – in South Australia.

Without good local publishers authors of books, that are not 'blockbusters' to be printed in considerable quantities, will have no avenue to bring to the notice of the public aspects of the Australian culture that we believe should be in existence for others to consider. If books can be published more cheaply overseas, there will be no incentive to publish locally. Once again, as with the Howard government, there will be no concern for the employment of local people in a wide range of occupations –writers, illustrators, cartographers, photographers, editors, all the different groups engaged in the provision of books of all kinds for the wide diversity of people in Australia.

I fear that the removal of the 1991 reforms confirming Australian territorial copyright in the supposed cause of cheapening the cost of books to consumers will undermine the intellectual life of Australia even further. The previous government, with its bilateral free trade agreement with the United States undermined Australian industries while opening trade in USA to the big business that could gain from it. At the same time USA did not open all areas equally to Australian competition. Countries like France value their cultural inheritance and protect all aspects of it. They nurture their own. Most particularly since 1996 we have not done so.

Australia, has not been noted for promoting our intellectual development and our creative capacity or protecting both from cheap competition. The previous Treasurer quite happily was heard to say, why value-add here when we can import what we need for other countries. He appeared to have no understanding of the significance of investment in the intellectual life of this nation.

It concerns me that the Productivity Commission, with its focus on economics first before social and environmental considerations has the power to undermine the authors, the publishers, the illustrators, and citizens who voted for the Rudd government so that we would not continue down their short-sighted path.

Looking to the future of our young people I am aware of outstanding children's books by Australian authors and illustrators and an increasing number of books by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander authors published by Australian publishers, such as Magabala Books. I should hate to see this aspect of Australian culture lost in the name of economic rationalism. If their books could be reprinted overseas the critical mass needed by such a publisher to continue to be profitable would decline.

The ASA and the APA have given the sound economic reasons for the continuation of the 1991 reforms. I look on the issue more as an Australian citizen concerned that we are not made even more of a dumping ground for overseas publishers.

Yours sincerely

Erica Jolly MACE
cc Steve Georganas MP, Member for Hindmarsh
cc the Hon Chris Bowen, MP