

To the Productivity Commission

Retail Industry Enquiry

My request is simple, please leave things the way they are. This will ensure that I do not feel victimised for the fact that not once, not even once at all have I ever been able to buy a pair of shoes in Australia. Every single piece of footwear that I need has had to be imported ever since I arrived in this country in 1975. This is not by choice or for any reason of trying to buy shoes cheaper, this is because I need size 13 AAA and this size is not sold in Australia.

When I came from New Zealand in 1975 I was able to get shoes from New Zealand from just one shop that sold just one line in my shoe size. Back then I was charged 80% import duty to have shoes sent to me. This was to protect the local industry, apparently by preventing people from importing shoes instead of buying locally but in my case, the local industry was not suffering from the fact that I didn't buy shoes locally because it couldn't sell me any. But then in 1980 the shoe shop in New Zealand closed. No other shoe shop continued with selling shoes in my size.

For nearly 10 years I was reduced to having to wear men's runners and thongs as my only form of footwear and as a result I got damaged knees because the runners were too wide for my feet and furthermore I was regarded rather unfavourably for my slack dress sense for wearing oversized men's runners as a schoolteacher. In 1991 a contact of my mother's in America sent some information to me enabling me to contact a business called Tall Gals in Boston and I had to send a letter to them with the tracing of my feet and they sent me back a catalogue which amazingly had real ladies shoes in my size and so I ordered some, and was immediately hit with excessive import taxes on top of the expensive postage and being at the mercy of the exchange rates. Despite requesting the government to consider my case as being disadvantaged, I was not given any credence for the fact that I had to import all my shoes and I was not given any relief from the high taxes.

I subsequently discovered that I could get around them by having the shoe shop send the shoes to me in a brown paper bag with a gift card. When Tall Gals closed in 1996 I then had Internet access to look for another shoe shop in America that would be happy to ship to Australia and I found just one. I have been buying my shoes from that one shoe shop ever since and they continued with the gift concept until 2006 when the government decided to discontinue collecting import duties on anything where the duty would amount to less than \$1000.

Despite the fact that this meant that we no longer had to play games with gift cards, it didn't make things any easier for me because I still have to buy without trying on. I still have to buy all my shoes from America, I'm still at the mercy of the exchange rate, I am still at the mercy of high postage costs, and I am not doing all of this for any reason other than extreme necessity. If I could buy my shoes locally I would be ecstatic. But I see no reason whatsoever that I should be penalised with additional taxes given that the shoes are already taxed at the source and the Australian shoe industry is not losing a sale at all. I should not be required to pay local taxes for something that I cannot buy locally but I most certainly do need. And as I am a runner and also a bushwalker and mountain climber, all my specialist shoes must also come from America for exactly the same reason, no shoe shop in Australia can sell me running shoes, walking shoes, dress shoes, trekking shoes, mountaineering shoes, bike shoes, slippers, sandals, loafers, nor even the right sized socks for a lady who is 6'2" tall and has feet that require shoes in size 13 AAA.

Therefore I request that there be no changes to the current system because in my case it would be highly discriminatory.