

Media Release

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Copyright rule plan is a triumph of ideology over evidence: Publishers

Australian publishers say the Productivity Commission's plan to abolish territorial copyright for Australian books is a triumph of arid, free-market dogma over evidence, and that it would cause great damage if accepted.

"It's a matter for the deepest regret that an agency charged with making better policy for the nation has continued with an outdated ideological crusade and ignored the evidence presented to its own inquiry," the CEO of the Australian Publishers Association, Maree McCaskill, said today.

"Its recommendations, if implemented, would make everyone worse off," she added.

"Jobs would be lost around Australia in printing and publishing. Aspiring authors would miss out on their chance to be published, and established authors would suffer income losses.

"The number of independent bookshops would fall. So would the number of book titles on sale in Australia.

"The Commission admitted all this in its interim report early this year – and it also agreed that books were no cheaper overseas when the 10-year average exchange rates were taken into account.

"On prices, the worst case scenario it can point to now is that over 10 years UK book prices would be slightly dearer than Australian prices and US prices slightly cheaper, by a matter of cents.

"It also admits there is no evidence of price falls when New Zealand abolished territorial copyright.

"The backflip from the Commission's previous plan to limit territorial copyright to 12 months, the lack of evidence of any community benefit from a change and the failure to model the impact of the recommendation expose the Commission's muddled thinking.

"Territorial copyright for books has been a great industry policy which has given Australia a strong and vibrant literary culture, a terrific range of books at highly competitive prices, and an enviable network of large and small bookshops.

"All State Premiers and Territory Leaders want it retained – as do authors, printers, publishers, agents and 90% of Australian booksellers.

"But it doesn't fit the rigid free market mindset of the Productivity Commission, which is determined to abolish it, evidence or no evidence.

"The Commission's recommendations should be clearly rejected by the Federal Government," Ms McCaskill said.