

SUBMISSION: A NEW NATIONAL CULTURAL POLICY

Australian Booksellers Association

21 April 2026 | Submitted by: Susannah Bowen, CEO

Local bookshops are essential cultural infrastructure: places where Australian stories are discovered and championed, where communities gather, and where readers of every age are formed.

Australia's bookshops enliven our suburbs and towns, drive local economies, and foster reading in our communities. They showcase Australian stories, selling more books by Australian authors, and from Australian publishers. They move beyond bestsellers, selling culturally and creatively important books that are critical to a vibrant literary culture, despite lower profit margins. They run regular community events and support local authors.

600 bricks-and-mortar bookshops in Australia¹
3.5-5% annual decline in bookshop numbers²
\$1.617B estimated annual value of Australia's print book sector³
24% of bookshop owners take no wages or dividend⁴

Local bookshops and chains together account for 43% of Australia's estimated \$1.617 billion annual print book market. Yet they compete against discount department stores and global giants such as Amazon that routinely sell below cost. Consumers lose: **local booksellers cannot match predatory pricing, resulting in fewer bookshops, diminished curation, and reduced discovery of Australian titles.** The industry is declining at 3.5-5% per year.

Bookshops lost to Australian communities in the last 12 months include:

- Books N Gifts, Nowra, NSW
- Blues Point Bookshop, McMahon's Point, NSW
- Meg's Bookshop, Port Pirie, SA
- Grace and Louie Booksellers, Emerald, VIC
- Read On Books, Maroubra, Westfield Eastgardens NSW
- Thesaurus Booksellers, Brighton VIC
- The Bookshop Darlinghurst, Darlinghurst NSW
- Harry Hartog, ANU, Kambria ACT
- Wildflowers and Reading Hours, Paddington QLD
- Good Earth Bookshop, Wentworth Falls, NSW
- Dymocks Joondalup WA
- Dymocks Tooronga VIC

¹ ABA data

² CPA Australia In The Black (2024). *The Surprise Resurgence of Australia's Independent Bookstores.* [Link](#)

³ NielsenIQ BookData (2024). *Reading the Markets: the UK Children's Book Consumer and ANZ trends in 2024.* [Link](#)

⁴ ABA (2025) *Australian Bookseller Survey 2025.* [Link](#)

Without deliberate policy intervention, more beloved community bookshops will close - taking with them cultural sector jobs, author pathways, and irreplaceable local cultural spaces.

The Australian Booksellers Association (ABA) welcomes the opportunity to contribute to the new National Cultural Policy. We represent the interests of Australia's bookshops, including independent bookshops, specialist bookshops, online, chain and franchise retailers across metro, regional, coastal, and tourism communities.

This submission addresses two pillars of the new National Cultural Policy, where we believe targeted government action will have the greatest impact: *Strong Cultural Infrastructure* and *Engaging the Audience*.

Pillar 4: Strong Cultural Infrastructure

Local bookshops constitute essential cultural infrastructure in the same way libraries, galleries, and performing arts venues do - but without comparable government support.

- Bookshops provide community gathering space for author events, book clubs, story times, school programs, and literary festivals.
- Bookshops provide employment in regional and tourist areas where cultural sector work is otherwise scarce. Many employ more than 10 staff and are known for fair conditions, regular hours, and supportive workplace cultures.⁵

To ensure bookselling remains a viable long-term career, **the industry needs investment in professional development**. A national certification scheme and targeted capacity-building grants would strengthen digital capability, business management, and workforce professionalisation - securing the pipeline of skilled booksellers that Australian communities depend on.

Bookshops and Australian publishers use legacy systems. **Strengthening the systems in use** will stabilise the local bookshop supply chain, create a base for competing online and assist with streamlining ordering and returns processes, bringing cost and environmental benefits to the book publishing industry.

Australia already supports live music venues, arts organisations, and regional cinemas through venue grants, rates relief, and rental subsidies. **Bookshops deserve equivalent recognition as cultural infrastructure**.

- The Australian Screen Production Incentive provides tax incentives for film, television and other screen production in Australia.
- The UK's Retail, Hospitality and Leisure scheme provides eligible bookshops with 40% business rates relief, up to a cash cap of £110,000 per business for 2025/26. Italy's Tax Credit Librerie offers independent bookstores up to €20,000 per year in tax relief on operating costs including rent, wages, and property taxes.
- France's Lang Law, which caps book discounts at 5% on local titles, has helped sustain 2,500 independent booksellers since 1981. Similar legislation exists in Italy, Germany, Spain, Belgium, and the Netherlands.

Australia should **establish comparable structural support for bookshops**.

⁵ ABA (2025) *Australian Bookseller Survey 2025*. [Link](#)

Policy Recommendations

- Fund establishment of a **skills training and certification program** development and delivery to professionalise the industry, creating recognised career pathways.
- Establish an **Australian Independent Bookshop Tax Offset** (AIBTO): a refundable tax rebate on core operating expenses including wages, rent, and purchases of Australian-authored titles, modelled on the Australian Screen Production Incentive, would deliver significant cultural and economic returns.
- Examine the feasibility of restrictions on **deep discounting of new-release Australian titles**, aligned with established European models.
- Investigate the case for **GST reduction or exemption on books**, consistent with international precedent.
- Invest in refreshing **legacy data systems** across the Australian book supply chain, increasing visibility for Australian books, reducing ordering costs and environmental wastage, and creating a technological base for online competition.

Pillar 5: Engaging the Audience

Australian audiences deserve Australian stories, and the joy of discovery. **Let's give every Australian child the excitement of choosing books to read and keep.**

Culture and **reading vouchers are successful mechanisms globally**. An existing mechanism for this recommendation is ABA Gift Cards, redeemable at bookshops Australia-wide.

Bookshops provide community space for events, gatherings and social connection, including author events, book clubs, story times, school events, workshops and more. Many bookshops run more than 25 events each year; some run multiple events each week.⁶ But bookshops in regional and rural areas and lower socio-economic areas struggle to fund events, meaning audiences get less exposure to culture and ideas.⁷

Policy Recommendations

- Support an **Australian Book Voucher Program**, redeemable at local bookshops nationwide, targeted at children starting primary school, government school students, school leavers or retirees.
- Fund **ongoing grants to support bookshop event delivery** including author events, book clubs, workshops, story times, and other community programs. Grant funding in this space benefits audiences and rolls down through the literature ecosystem, benefitting authors as well as audiences.

Conclusion

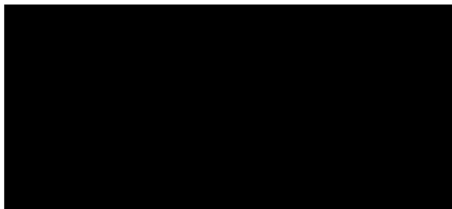
The new National Cultural Policy is an opportunity to recognise what communities across Australia already know: local bookshops are irreplaceable. They are where Australian stories find their


⁶ ABA (2025) *Australian Bookseller Survey 2025*. [Link](#)

readers, where literary careers begin, where children fall in love with reading, and where communities come together.

But they need support. The ABA proposes a practical, affordable, and internationally proven set of interventions to help books reach the audiences that want to find them and to empower Australians to discover their own stories in books.

The total cost of the measures we propose is modest, relative to existing cultural expenditures and to the economic and social value that local bookshops generate. We urge the government to include these measures in the new National Cultural Policy and in the forthcoming federal Budget.



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ABA's advocacy platform, including detailed recommendations and data sources is available at <https://www.aba.org.au/about-us/advocacy/>

Detailed scoping is available for all policy recommendations.