

National Cultural Policy Submission

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Public

Organisation

123Read2Me The Free Children's Book Charity

Short submission (text box 500 words or less)

Every Child Deserves a Bedtime Story

Submission to the National Cultural Policy Consultation

Minister,

I am the founder of 123Read2Me, a fully volunteer children's literacy charity that has distributed more than one million books to children, families and schools across Australia. Through this frontline work, I see every day how access to books can change a child's future.

If Australia wants future audiences, future writers, future creators and future citizens who feel connected to this country, we must start early.

Culture does not begin in a gallery, on a stage or at a festival.

It begins when an adult opens a book and shares a story with a child.

In that daily moment, a child learns words, empathy, curiosity and confidence. That is where readers begin. That is where opportunity begins.

One of Australia's overlooked cultural challenges is that too many children are being locked out of culture before they even begin school — through low literacy, limited access to books and the quiet decline of reading aloud in family life.

When children are not taught to read well, Australia loses more than literacy. We lose potential before it has the chance to emerge. We lose future scientists, artists, innovators, skilled workers and informed citizens.

In a future shaped by artificial intelligence and constant change, children who cannot read confidently risk being left behind.

That is why reading aloud, book access and early literacy are not soft issues.

They are nation-building essentials.

What I Would Like Reflected in the New National Cultural Policy

I would like the policy to recognise reading, books and early literacy as the front door to lifelong cultural participation.

Australia does not need a new bureaucracy to act. We can use systems already in place: schools, libraries, maternal health, childcare, councils, volunteers and community organisations.

A modest national initiative could deliver visible results quickly:

Read Aloud Australia — a simple national message: Read to a child for 10 minutes a day.

Support book access for disadvantaged homes, under-resourced schools and children in out-of-home care.

Support Student Reading Leaders, where older students read with younger students.

Support Grab a Granny, mobilising older Australians as volunteer readers, helping children while reducing loneliness.

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Support First Nations Story Strength, enabling Indigenous youth and Elders to share stories, language and culture through community-led reading programs.

Why This Matters

This is affordable, practical, popular and preventative.

It helps children before expensive problems become entrenched. It strengthens families and community connection. It supports long-term economic resilience because literacy is the foundation skill beneath every industry.

It is far less expensive to build readers early than to repair disengagement later.

The National Choice

We can pay later for low literacy and lost potential.

Or we can invest early in one of the most powerful habits ever known:

An adult opening a book with a child.

Few reforms are this simple.

Few are this affordable.

Few carry returns across generations.

If we want a stronger Australia tomorrow, we should read to children today.

Every child deserves a bedtime story.

Melinda Shelley

Founder, 123Read2Me

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