

STORIES BY THE SEA

27/04/2026

Dear Minister Burke,

I am writing as a bookseller to urge the government to include meaningful support for local bookshops in the new National Cultural Policy. My bookshop, **Stories by the Sea**, has operated in **Mount Eliza on the Mornington Peninsula** since August 2025.

Nestled on the land of the Bunurong people of the South-Eastern Kulin Nation, our shop is more than a retail space; it is a community hub designed to be a sanctuary for story, inclusion, and creativity. We curate a specialized collection that highlights First Nations literature, design, architecture, and youth literature, while serving as a vital place of employment for neurodiverse young adults.

Local bookshops are not merely retail businesses; they are cultural infrastructure. However, the reality of maintaining this infrastructure is becoming increasingly unsustainable. At Stories by the Sea, we have made a conscious commitment to providing a place where neurodiverse young adults "belong." Because we cannot bring ourselves to turn away those who need this safe environment, our wage costs currently exceed what the business can afford. We are effectively leaking money to maintain this social lifeline, and while we are exploring every possible alternative funding model to keep our doors open, we are reaching a breaking point.

The support measures we are calling for are not about luxury; they are about the survival of spaces that provide essential social and cultural services. Australia lags behind comparable countries in protecting its book retail sector. France, Italy, the UK, and Germany have introduced proven measures (discount caps, tax offsets, and rates relief) that have stabilized their independent bookshop sectors.

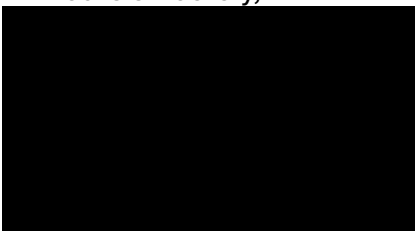
I support the Australian Booksellers Association's call to support local bookshops through the following:

- **Establish an Australian Independent Bookshop Tax Offset (AIBTO):** A refundable tax rebate on core operating expenses, including wages, would be a transformative step in helping us sustain our inclusive employment model.
- **Fund a skills training and certification programme:** To professionalise the industry and create recognised career pathways for our staff.
- **Enable accessibility and price stability:** Examine restrictions on deep discounting of new-release Australian titles and investigate GST exemptions on books.
- **Support an Australian Book Voucher Programme:** Targeted at children or retirees to drive foot traffic back into local hubs.
- **Expand ongoing grants for events:** Funding for author events and workshops that foster community connection.

Opening this shop was a long-held family passion. I love seeing our staff find their confidence and a sense of identity behind our counter, but I fear that without structural support, specialized spaces like ours; which prioritize community well-being over pure profit; will simply vanish. These proposed measures are modest and internationally proven, yet they would provide the vital breathing room we need to continue our mission.

I urge the government to act before more of these irreplaceable community anchors are forced to close.

Yours sincerely,



Owner, Stories by the Sea  