

Dear Minister Burke,

I am writing as the owner of the Mary Martin Bookshops in Melbourne to urge the government to include meaningful support for local bookshops in the new National Cultural Policy.

My main bookshop has operated in Southbank for over 30 years. 2 of my other bookshops are located within the community and tourist destinations of Queen Victoria Market and South Melbourne Market. We currently have a team of a dozen smart, hardworking and dedicated individuals who deserve to be upskilled in a complex profession and for whom there is little career path.

Local bookshops are not merely retail businesses. They are cultural infrastructure - community gathering places where Australian stories are discovered, where children fall in love with reading, and where literary careers begin. Yet every year bookshops close, undermined by online giants and discount department stores. Our experience is one of very lean margins and for many months of the year, I have to subsidise the bookshop from my personal funds. This is clearly neither an ideal nor a sustainable model.

Australia lags behind comparable countries in protecting its book retail sector. France, Italy, the UK, Germany, and more have introduced proven measures - discount caps, tax offsets, and rates relief - that have stabilised their independent bookshop sectors.

Australia should do the same. I support the Australian Booksellers Association's call to support local bookshops as cultural infrastructure, creating audience engagement:

- Establish an Australian Independent Bookshop Tax Offset : a refundable tax rebate on core operating expenses including wages, rent, and capital expenditure would deliver significant cultural and economic returns. As a former scientist in the medical R & D sector, I view bookshops as no less an important element of our social cohesion and well being as research organisations and equally deserving adequate investment.
- Fund establishment of a skills training and certification programme development and delivery to professionalise the industry, creating recognised career pathways
- Enable accessibility to books and bookshops for all Australians. Study pricing and discounts; examine the feasibility of restrictions on deep discounting of new-release Australian titles, aligned with established European models, and investigate the case for GST reduction or exemption on books, consistent with international precedent.

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- Support an Australian Book Voucher Programme, redeemable at local bookshops nationwide, targeted at children or retirees. An existing mechanism for this recommendation is ABA Gift Cards, redeemable at bookshops Australia-wide and online.
- Support and expand ongoing grants for events in bookshops including author events, book clubs, workshops, story times, and other community programmes. Grant funding in this space benefits audiences and authors and the wider community.

The brick and mortar bookshops owned by local individuals and families are a safe haven, a place of discovery and learning, of community and cultural identity. They contribute to social good like very few other retail spaces but there is a market failure that those not adequately financially compensate for this. As well the financially predatory nature of the online giants and the discount distribution outlets further exacerbates our already vulnerable bookshops.

I urge the government to act. Local bookshops are irreplaceable - but without support, more will close. The measures proposed by the ABA are modest, internationally proven, and would deliver significant cultural and economic returns.

Yours sincerely,

Dr Jaye PF Chin-Dusting

Proprietor, Mary Martin Bookshops



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