

1 May 2026
NATIONAL CULTURAL POLICY CONSULTATION
The Australian Government

Dear Minister Burke,

Re: NATIONAL CULTURAL POLICY

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, Readers Retreat, has operated in Salamander Bay Port Stephens for almost 3 years. We are a bookshop where words and people come together. Our bookshop stocks an eclectic range of new and used books. We will offer small group face-to-face writing workshops delivered from our cosy writing room. Our events will include author talks, book launches, writing groups and book clubs. Our aim is to create a community hub for people who love words, reading and writing.

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.

Readers Retreat is in an industrial area because it would be impossible to operate this business under a commercial lease. Although social media means customers looking for books are able to find me easily, we miss out on walk in trade or passersby. Even without the pressure of a commercial lease we still experience financial pressure and are unable to fund any form of paid advertising or marketing.

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 (AIBTO): a refundable tax rebate on core operating expenses including wages, rent, and capital expenditure would deliver significant cultural and economic returns.
- 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.

- 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.

At Readers Retreat we are passionate about supporting a culture of reading and writing. Bringing people together to learn, share, engage and connection means we offer an important contribution to society.

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,

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Living and working on Worimi Country

