

## National Cultural Policy Submission

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Public

Individual

Laraine Stephens

Short submission (text box 500 words or less)

Dear Minister Burke,

I am writing as an independent bookshop customer to urge the government to include meaningful support for local bookshops in the new National Cultural Policy.

My local bookshop, BEAUMARIS BOOKS has operated in the Melbourne Bayside suburb of BEAUMARIS for over 24 years. During my time as Head of Library at Firbank Grammar School, [REDACTED] provided us with impeccable service, visiting regularly with the latest books and recommendations. Without them, the students would have been missing out on new and classic fiction, and non-fiction that would provide them with the information they required. Sure, we had the internet, but everyone is aware that the information that is on it can be incorrect or misleading.

I also used the services of THESAURUS BOOKSELLERS in Brighton. It is worth noting that they closed down in January this year, unable to afford the rent, and undermined by retail giants, such as Amazon. That is 48 years of being a respected and loved local business down the drain.

When I retired, I took up writing and am now a historical crime writer with a nine-book contract with an American publishing company. Thesaurus and Beaumaris Books supported me by selling and promoting my books. And now Thesaurus is gone. Don't let that happen to Beaumaris Books! Or any other independent bookshop. 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 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 Arts are undervalued but are an essential part of Australian culture. Do we want our kids to have an education that allows them to be literate and independent thinkers? Do we want to lose an essential part of community life? Without independent bookshops the coming generation will be the poorer. 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,

Laraine Stephens

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