

National Cultural Policy Submission

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Public

Individual

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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. I regularly use a number of local bookshops on the Mornington Peninsula, to order and buy books and to sit and browse. 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. 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.

Bricks-and-mortar local bookshops are an essential part of the local community infrastructure. One of their most important functions is to encourage young people to discover the magic of printed books, in a world dominated by electronic media. 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, Daan Spijer

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