

Dear Minister Burke,

I am writing as a writer and former bookseller to urge the government to include meaningful support for local bookshops in the new National Cultural Policy.

The bookshop I worked in, Antipodes Bookshop and Gallery, has operated in Sorrento for over twenty-five years.

Antipodes is a one-of-a-kind hub of community, ideas, books and art that is the only shop like it serving the Mornington Peninsula between Portsea and Safety Beach. It hosts so many incredible author in-conversation events, workshops, and children's storytelling sessions. Local kids, teachers and parents come in regularly and find the shop and its knowledgeable, welcoming staff an invaluable resource. [REDACTED] the owner, is always championing local writers and passionately selling the work of local artists and jewellers.

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 chains that sell books at 40–50% below recommended retail price.

Antipodes has been publicly under financial strain, and recently they held a local fundraiser to try and keep their doors open. It would be absolutely devastating if this incredible retailer, which has been an integral part of the Mornington Peninsula community for decades, were to close. It would affect local schools, local kids, local book-lovers, and local writers/artists the most, but it would also be a big loss for the seasonal tourists who love visiting the shop in the school holidays, public holidays and summer months. Bookshops also promote and sustain childhood literacy in a real and impactful way.

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:

- Fund establishment of a skills training and certification program development and delivery to professionalise the industry, creating recognised career pathways.
 - Establish an Australian Independent Bookshop Tax Offset (AIBTO): a refundable tax rebate on core operating expenses including wages, rent, and purchases of Australian-authored titles.
 - Examine the feasibility of restrictions on deep discounting of new-release Australian titles, aligned with established European models.
- April 2026
- Investigate the case for GST reduction or exemption on books, consistent with international precedent.
 - Invest in refreshing legacy data systems across the Australian book supply chain.
 - Support an Australian Book Voucher Program, redeemable at local bookshops nationwide.
 - Fund ongoing grants to support bookshop event delivery including author events,

book clubs, workshops, story times, and other community programs.

Working in Antipodes between 2018 and 2022, I adored selling books and art both to locals and tourists, and helping the owner [REDACTED] to operate popular author in-conversation nights and children's events. One particular highlight of Antipodes was the bookmark competition where children could illustrate and colour in their own Antipodes bookmark based on their favourite books – the winners would see their creations printed on bookmarks and distributed in the shop for the next year. This delightful competition can no longer take place due to increasing financial constraints and pressures that Antipodes faces.

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,
Charlotte Callander

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