

4 May 2026

Dear Minister Burke,

I am writing to you as a children's book author and illustrator based in Melbourne, to urge the government to include meaningful support for local bookshops in the new National Cultural Policy.

My work as a creator is inseparable from the life of my local bookshop community.

A few minutes from my home in Melbourne is The Little Bookroom - the oldest bookshop in the world specialising exclusively in children's books. It is a place of extraordinary cultural significance: a gathering point for the KidLit community, a launchpad for Australian children's literature, and a beloved space where young readers discover stories that shape who they become. It has survived by sheer determination, navigating changes of ownership, relocations, and relentless financial pressure, yet it remains the beating heart of our community.

As a mother of three children growing up in this city, and as an author and illustrator who depends on the direct connection that independent bookshops provide, I have seen first-hand what these spaces make possible.

I regularly contribute to book launches, school holiday workshops, and author events at The Little Bookroom and other independents. These collaborations do something that no online retailer can replicate: they bring stories to life in community, they introduce children to creators they can speak to, and they make reading feel like an adventure rather than a transaction.

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.

The talented booksellers at independents like The Little Bookroom do something of profound national importance: they curate, champion, and amplify Australian voices. Without them, children's shelves would be dominated by American and UK imports, and the distinctly Australian stories - the ones that reflect our landscapes, our humour, our multicultural communities - would struggle to be heard.

These booksellers actively shape Australian cultural identity, one carefully chosen recommendation at a time.

Yet these shops are disappearing, one by one. The financial pressures are relentless. Online giants and discount chains sell books at 40–50% below

recommended retail price ,which is a margin that independent bookshops, with their rents, their skilled staff, their community programming, simply cannot match.

I have watched The Little Bookroom fight for survival across multiple decades: changing hands, relocating, adapting - always on the edge. When I participate in an event there, I often wonder: will this shop still be here next year? The loss of even one such bookshop is not just an economic event. It is a cultural bereavement. For me personally, it would mean losing the direct connection to young readers that gives my work as a children's author its deepest meaning.

Australia lags behind comparable countries in protecting its book retail sector. France, Italy, the UK, Germany, and others have introduced proven measures - discount caps, tax offsets, and rates relief - that have stabilised their independent bookshop sectors. Australia should do the same. These are not radical interventions; they are modest, internationally tested policies with proven cultural and economic returns.

I support the Australian Booksellers Association's call to:

- Fund the establishment of a skills training and certification program to professionalise the industry and create 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.
- 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.

I love what I do because stories change children's lives - but stories need a home! Independent bookshops are that home. They are the places where a child picks up a book they didn't know they needed, where a parent discovers an

Australian picture book that will be read a hundred times, where a young illustrator sees their work on a shelf and understands that their voice matters. What I fear losing is not just a retail category, but the irreplaceable human infrastructure of book culture: the passionate, knowledgeable booksellers who know their customers' names and their children's reading stages; the community events that make literacy feel joyful; the curated shelves that say, quietly but powerfully, "Australian stories matter here."

What I hope this policy will achieve is simple: that the next generation of Australian children grows up with access to brilliant, locally-rooted bookshops - shops that champion our stories, nurture our authors, and give every child the chance to fall in love with reading. Tax relief, rent subsidies, discounting restrictions, and community event grants are not luxuries. They are the minimum required to keep these vital cultural institutions alive.

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 for all Australians.

Yours sincerely,



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