

Tuesday 5th May, 2026

Dear Minister Burke,

I am writing as a lifelong reader, a parent raising two readers, a partner and daughter in a family of readers, and as an Australian writer of children's books, to urge the government to include meaningful support for local bookshops in the new National Cultural Policy.

I live in regional Tasmania, and reading is deeply embedded in our family life. We read every day, multiple books a day, across many formats. We have created traditions around books. Every Christmas we visit our local Devonport Bookshop, and our children each choose a book, which we then leave with the booksellers to pass on to someone in the community who might need or appreciate it. On Christmas Eve, we celebrate the Icelandic tradition of *Jólabókaflóð*, the "Christmas Book Flood", where books are given and then read together that same evening.

For us, these traditions have become a way of slowing down, connecting as a family, and placing reading at the centre of our celebrations. These traditions are made possible, and meaningful, because of local bookshops.

Local bookshops are not merely retail businesses; a bookseller can recommend the perfect book for a five-year-old's birthday, a work colleague, neighbour, or a difficult-to-buy-for relative. That kind of knowledge, care, and human connection cannot be replicated by large discount retailers or online algorithms.

As a writer of children's picture books, I also see firsthand how important bookshops are in bringing Australian stories to life. They are where new voices are discovered, where books are hand-sold with enthusiasm, and where children encounter stories that reflect their own lives.

Bookshops 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.

Regional communities like mine are particularly vulnerable; we rely on fewer cultural institutions, and the loss of a local bookshop would be deeply felt. While cheaper options exist online or through large retailers, they do not replace what is lost: the expertise, the community role, and the cultural value of a local 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:

- 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.
- 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.

As a parent, I want my children to grow up in a country where reading is supported not just in schools, but in communities. As a writer, I want Australian stories to have a place to be discovered and championed by booksellers who care about stories, writers and literacy. And as a regional Australian, I know how important it is to protect the cultural spaces we do have.

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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