

Submission to the National Cultural Policy Consultation

From: Paperchain Bookstore, [REDACTED]

Date: May 2026

Dear Minister Burke,

We are writing as a small, family-run Independent Bookstore business to urge the government to include meaningful support for local independent bookshops in the new National Cultural Policy.

Paperchain Bookstore has operated in Canberra since 1982 — more than four decades of service to the Canberra community. With fourteen staff, we are the ACT's oldest and most established independent booksellers, and we are proud of the role we play in the cultural life of this city and nationally to our many loyal customers and community.

Paperchain is woven into the fabric of community in ways that go well beyond retail. We sponsor the ACT Government's Chief Minister's Reading Challenge, a program for primary and high schools through which we are supporting literacy and a love of books in young Canberrans. We host a full programme of author events, book clubs, and community gatherings that bring people together around ideas and stories. We champion local and Australian authors, and we actively support local organisations and schools across the ACT.

Independent bookshops across Australia, like many other small businesses, face ongoing challenges associated with small margins squeezed by the pricing power of online giants and discount department stores who operate without the same commitment to community, to Australian stories, or to the cultural fabric of our cities and towns. Such pressures force difficult choices: events and investments in community programming we cannot afford to undertake.

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.

I support the Australian Booksellers Association's (ABA) call to recognise and support local bookshops as cultural infrastructure:

- **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 a skills training and certification programme** to professionalise the industry and create recognised career pathways for booksellers.
- **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,

