

Dear Minister Burke,

I am writing as an Australian citizen, children's book author and scientist, to urge the government to include meaningful support for local bookshops and school libraries in the new National Cultural Policy.

Children are our future, and the main way that they can access the full range and diversity of children's literature is through their school library, local library, and local bookstores. Children's books are a vital communication tool for the whole community, as adults such as parents, grandparents, teachers, librarians, etc. read and discuss the books with the children (and also may gain personally from this exposure). My purpose as a children's author, is to expose children (and their adults) to science and the Australian environment.

Additionally, as an author, our local independent bookstores are a particularly vital conduit to sharing our work with our community, both through their support with inhouse signing events and with promoting and selling our work. Staff at these stores are passionate about books and are extremely knowledgeable about the industry, including their local authors. The independent book stores are also important gathering places where Australian stories are discovered, where children fall in love with reading, and where literary careers begin.

I live in Canberra, and we have several booksellers that contribute to the local cultural infrastructure and support local authors, such as Harry Hartogs, Dymocks, QBD, and the spectacular Book Cow in Kingston which has a dedicated room for children's books. I have had the support of the Book Cow to launch my last two books at the Book Cow, and I have attended many author events there. The Children's Book Council of Australia ACT Chapter announces the Notables, Shortlisted and Winning children's books annually at this venue.

Sadly, every year independent bookstores close in Australia, as they are undermined by the online giants and discount chain stores that sell books at 40–50% below recommended retail price. This also significantly reduces the royalties that authors receive, meaning that most of us authors and illustrators cannot make a living from our craft. In Canberra, we have recently lost one of the three Harry Hartog stores—the one at the Australian National University. This is such a shame, as this store also had the space to support authors to give training workshops and seminars. This opportunity for us is now lost.

Australia lags behind comparable countries in protecting its book retail sector. France, Italy, the UK, Germany, and more have introduced proven measures, such as discount caps, tax offsets, and rates relief. These have helped to 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.

Similarly, school libraries are an invaluable component of a child's education. As a former library monitor myself, and now an author and scientist, I can attest that I would not have had the careers and contribution to Australian society that I have had, without my school libraries and the wonderful and knowledgeable librarians that staff them. However, many schools around the country are closing their libraries; in particular, these are often the first thing to be sacrificed in tight fiscal environment. Therefore, in developing the National Cultural Policy, please factor in the significant role of the school library and consider the following:

- Create and fund a national program that financially supports school libraries and prevents them from closing.

In closing, I thank the Government for the great cultural contribution that it is currently making, but I urge you, Minister Burke, to consider the above points and act on them. Local bookshops and school libraries are irreplaceable - but without support, more will close. The measures proposed above are modest, internationally proven, and would deliver significant cultural and economic returns for the independent bookstores, and a national program to support school libraries and prevent further closures would no doubt be a vital cultural contribution (and more) to Australia's children and its future.

Yours sincerely



7 May 2026

