

Dear Minister Burke,

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

My bookshop, Rosebud Book Barn, has operated in Rosebud, Victoria for 23 years.

In these 23 years we have worked closely with our local community to bring readers and authors together. Organising events and book launches. We have championed local, independent authors. Working closely with our local writing community. Providing a platform for all voices to be heard. We have also sponsored countless local events. We have also supported many local writing competitions, both financially and with our time.

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.

Small businesses across the country are currently under great financial pressure. No more than independent bookstores. My family opened this store 23 years ago, and with the exception of Covid related lockdowns, this is by far the most difficult period we have ever experienced. The flow on effect of this impacts our staff, reducing their hours and limiting the amount of staff we can currently employ. The greater community suffers due to this too, as we are unfortunately now much more selective with which events and sponsorship we are able to support. Each day we are forced into competition with much larger companies on an uneven playing field.

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.

For our industry to survive, we will require some of the same support afforded to our overseas counterparts. Booksellers are able to offer something special that you simply cannot replicate online or in large discount stores.

I have been very privileged to work alongside some exceptional and passionate booksellers. I fear that without support, our industry will not only lose these people to other careers, but also fail to attract the next generation of booksellers.

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,



General Manager  
The Book Barn