

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, Belgrave Book Barn, has operated in Belgrave, Victoria for 31 years.

In the last 3 decades we have worked to become a central point for readers in the Dandenong Ranges. We have been privileged to launch books for countless authors, organised workshops and in recent years become a key part of the Dandenong Ranges Literary Festival. Many schools and organisations rely on our support and assistance during the year to help fund and promote their events.

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.

When my family opened our bookstore in 1995, we could not have anticipated just how important our presence would be, providing a place for readers and writers to come together. For last minute gifts and for long conversations with our customers about their favourite books. The challenges we faced in our early years could not have prepared us for the difficult period we entered during Covid, and the uncertain financial times all small businesses find themselves in right now.

In recent years we have had to reduce opening hours, which has impacted the amount of staff we have been able to employ. We have also been forced to greatly reduce the amount of community sponsorship we provide.

Our business has grown and evolved over the past 30 years. Each year this is made more difficult as larger businesses enter the market. Operating on a scale impossible for small businesses to compete on. As the next generation of my family now take over responsibilities in our business, we do so 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.

Sadly, each year we see more independent bookstores close. Booksellers offer something special to readers that cannot be replicated in large department stores or on soulless overseas websites. Good booksellers find the right book for the right reader. Great booksellers do this for an entire career. If our industry is not provided with support we will lose passionate and knowledgeable people to other sectors. This not only hurts the bookstore industry, but directly impacts the Australian Publishing industry. Australian Booksellers have always been the most vocal supporters of Australian literature.

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,

██████████

Owner/Manager
The Book Barn