

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, Ladyhawke, has operated in Ivanhoe, Melbourne for just under two years. We are a bricks and mortar bookstore in a sunny spot, staffed by five passionate booksellers and servicing a lucky community with high rates of education and a bit of disposable income.

Like most bookshops we are not merely a retail business. We are cultural infrastructure. We are a place that hires LGBTQI+ staff and welcomes all customers. We are a place for the old and the lonely and the bereaved and all the young tradies who pop in to beg us to help them get off their phones by suggesting something that will get back into reading. Is it too much to say we are a place that fosters critical thought and empathy? I don't think so.

Yet every year bookshops close, undermined by online giants and discount chains that sell books at 40–50% below recommended retail price. Sorry, customer who has just asked us to price match to Kmart, we are not able to sell this book to you at the very same price we bought it. Or, if we did, we'd be out of business in about three weeks and all the good, thoughtful, considered and kind things we do for our community would be gone. The tradie would probably not bother popping into Kmart for a book, given there is no one there to actually sell the books and make recommendations. He'll stay on his phone, doomscrolling and losing that chance to engage healthily in the world.

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.

Local bookshops are irreplaceable – an antidote to a society where it is all too easy to opt out, to spend time in online places that foster unhealthy behaviours. But without support, more bookshops will close. The measures proposed by the ABA are modest, internationally proven, and would deliver significant cultural and economic returns. The Arts are fundamental to a healthy society. Please turn your attention to ways the government can support bookstores to do what we do.

All best wishes

[REDACTED]

Ladyhawke

[REDACTED]