

Dear Minister Burke,

I am writing as a children's book editor and lifelong reader to urge the government to include meaningful support for local bookshops in the new National Cultural Policy.

The company I work for, a major publisher of children's books, has become increasingly dependent on the big chains like Big W and Kmart selling locally authored books at discounted prices, which is narrowing the scope and variety of the books we can publish. I would love to see local bookshops supported more culturally in their work so that their selling channel continues to be significant enough that we can create and publish a broader mix of Australian titles.

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.

These days, when we create a new book series for kids, if they aren't overnight bestsellers, Big W and Kmart do not support them beyond the first book. This often means that even we know many children are enjoying them (maybe as their first independent read), that we have to let them down by not continuing the series. Breaking trust with those children and potentially failing them at a time when continuing on with a book series they are enjoying would cement a lifelong love of reading. If smaller booksellers and chains had more support to continue to exist and compete with larger players on a more even playing field, it could allow us to continue supporting these series that parents, teachers and booksellers tell us these kids are loving. Local booksellers are more likely to spot a series that is more of a slow burn, taking longer to build.

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. 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.

In a time when so many things are becoming virtual and on line, experiences that are 'For Real Life' (as Bluey would say), are increasingly important and impactful for children. As a child, being able to

explore bookshops and hold printed books in my hands built the framework that set me up to enjoy stories even as they moved into the digital and audio formats that became more convenient for me as an adult.

For small people, libraries and small bookshops can be quiet havens promising reprieve when life is difficult, and you don't know who to talk to. Bullying, family breakdowns, divorce, displacement—the solace and strength I drew from the treasured books I found in these places a child probably saved me (and the government) thousands in counselling fees... While also making me a more literate, thoughtful community member.

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,

A solid black rectangular box redacting the signature of the author.

Commissioning Editor