

Office for the Arts
Department of Infrastructure, Transport,
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AUTHOR SUBMISSION FOR THE NATIONAL CULTURAL POLICY

I am an award winning, internationally published children's author who has published over 40 books. I have written picture books for pre-schoolers, junior fiction, contemporary middle grade fiction, fantasy adventure, adult non-fiction, and Australian historical novels for older readers which have been studied in many schools around the country.

My novels have been shortlisted and won many awards, including being shortlisted 12 times in the Young Australian Best Book Awards, (YABBA) and Kids Own Australian Literature Awards (KOALA) which are voted for by Australian children. In addition, my books have been published overseas and translated into different languages including Portuguese, Afrikaans, Turkish and Czech.

Over the last 20 years, I have experienced the increasing challenges facing the Australian book industry including:

- the continuing contraction of the Australian publishing industry through declining book sales
- the significant impact of falling reading rates amongst Australian children
- the theft of author's intellectual property, including my own work, to train AI
- the alarming rise of generative AI to create works
- diminishing sources of income such as a decline in school budgets to pay for author presentations and writing workshops
- increased discounting of book RRP's
- the on-going closure of independent bookstores
- increased competition for increasingly limited publishing opportunities.

Personally, I have seen my income from writing diminish significantly in recent years, as it has for most of my peers. Some of Australia's best loved book creators have stopped writing books because they can no longer afford to write. Without immediate support, we risk the viability of the book industry in Australia.

I am a member of the Australian Society of Authors (ASA) and am grateful for the initiatives introduced in *Revive*, particularly digital lending rights, to assist with the sustainability of author and illustrator careers. However, since then, authors have been facing increasingly precarious conditions.

Initiatives which would be valuable include:

- Nationwide authors-in-schools program funded out of education budgets.
- Direct investment in authors and illustrators.
- Action on the unprecedented theft of Australian authors creative work by AI companies.
- A top up to the Lending Rights budget.
- a tax-free threshold for writers and illustrators.
- Increased tax-free grants and fellowships for authors.
- Other strategies recommended by the ASA to support author and illustrator incomes.

Australia is facing a literacy crisis with large numbers of Australian children unable to read at their age level, particularly indigenous children, those in regional areas and from lower socio-economic areas. Research has shown that access to quality books is essential to encourage children to read.

Australian children deserve to see Australian culture, history, landscape, animals and people reflected in the books they read. However, it is becoming increasingly impossible for Australian authors to make a living.

I fully support the Australian Society of Authors and their strategies to support Australian writers and illustrators.

Yours sincerely,

Belinda Murrell
Author