

May 12<sup>th</sup> 2026

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, Pictures and Pages Bookstore located in Coburg, Victoria, first opened in 2014 and has been a treasured gem in our little community for the past 12 years. I took over from the previous 2 female owners 3 years ago in June 2023. After running the store for 9 years the 2 local mums decided it was time to pass on the business. As a customer, a mother of 3 and local to the area, I decided with no experience to save our local little bookstore. We have been buying books and gifts from the bookstore since it opened in 2014. We are an independent family-owned bookstore with a large children's offering.

Bookstores are not only spaces where people can purchase books, they are safe spaces where everyone is welcome, where our customers, young and old, come in for a chat. With the decline in literacy, we need to keep bookstores open and available to our community. When you support your local bookstore, you are supporting your local community. We often donate vouchers and books to local schools and early learning centers, stocking cards and gifts from local businesses.

We support our local authors by running story time, meet the author events and book clubs. We offer our schools and early learning centers educational discounts and donate towards school and community fundraisers. Over the last 3 years we have supported local authors such as Andrew McDonald, Emma Bowd, Mitchell Toy, Roanna McClelland and schools and early learning centers such as Coburg, Coburg West and Coburg North Primary School.

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.

It is only myself that is full time in the bookstore; I have a casual staff member help one day a week as it is all that I can afford and when we have author events. Being the only person instore makes it very difficult to stay on top of the paperwork which I then take home and



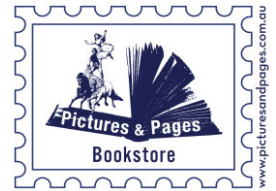
start once the children (I have 3 young children aged 11, 9 and 5) are in bed. This all leads to being burnt out for very little financial reward and that's how little bookstores like me end up closing.

There are many more initiatives I would love to put in place, however, have not been able to implement them due to time, cost and lack of staff, which I cannot afford. I would attend more industry events such as the ABA book conference held every year however I cannot afford the tickets, accommodation and airfare along with pay staff whilst I am away.

Independent bookstores are a community service, especially the small ones, we offer a safe space, work very hard to stock books which are published and released monthly, where we compete with discount retailers who sell the books at prices we cannot even purchase them at. The margins are usually 40%, however, they are less if you have just opened. My opening orders were priced at 35% and 37.5% margins with some still remaining now. This is very little considering a standard trade paperback retails at approximately \$35.00 with a 37.5% margin all the profit you have is \$12.25 that is before you pay for rent, rates, electricity, insurance, gst and wages. My current wage is \$250.00 per week for 6 days work. The rest of the money goes back into the store for stock and outgoings. We need legislation on fixed retail prices on new release titles so that the big retail discount giants cannot discount titles within 3mths of the book release.

Australia lags 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.

Independent bookstores need your support and funding, they are mostly run and owned by local community members doing it for the community not for the money. If we were to see closure of our independent bookstores, the whole landscape of literature would change. Independent bookstores are the ones who support their local independent authors and publishers, giving the industry a bigger look into diverse reads and authors. 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,

Lien Giang

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