

May 15, 2026

Dear Minister Burke,

My name is Shelley McRoberts, and I am writing as a writer and illustrator to urge the government to include meaningful support for local bookshops in the new National Cultural Policy.

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.

Recently, I have noticed, in our small neighborhood of Yarraville, *The Younger Sun*, bookshop had to close their children's flagship store and combine with their main bookstore for adults next to the Sun Theatre. My children loved going to *The Younger Sun*, and we visited here every weekend to browse new titles and purchase new books which kept them engaged in reading. The bookshop also had many showcase opportunities for writers and illustrators, and engaged the local community. Now that they have been forced to combine stores, they are unable to accommodate the quantity and variety of children's books. It's not merely their own (kids') space anymore and they aren't as excited to visit the shop nowadays. This is only one such example of another fantastic small bookshop that has been forced to accommodate the dire economic

situation for small bookstores. They simply can't compete with the Big W, Kmart, etc, which do not stock the same quality of books - These are hallmark books for the most part. I don't want to support a chain store that stocks a few books. I want my children to have the experience of a real local bookshop like the *Strand* in NYC or *Powells* in Portland, Oregon. It's time for Melbourne to not merely be listed in the list of "most liveable cities worldwide", but to stand for something that is a part of our cultural landscape; support reading, support education in our children through local bookstores, support local talent of writers and illustrators to get their works out there for kids! We know they don't get paid enough either.

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.

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,

Shelley A. McRoberts

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