

Dear Minister Burke,

Our names are [REDACTED], and we are the owners of Collins Booksellers Shepparton. Our store has been part of the local community for 32 years, and We have owned and operated it for the last 20 years come September and employing up to 6 staff and serving readers across the Golden Valley region and beyond with attachment area of approximately of 100km with customers travelling from central New South Wales, Albury Wodonga, Yay, Alexandra to get to our store.

Bookshops are not just retail businesses. They are cultural spaces where people discover stories, connect with ideas and engage with their community. In our store, we see this every day through conversations with customers, children discovering books, and local events such as author events.

Reading is the cornerstone of our society without it we cannot look forward. Over the years we've seen many children come through our doors and they love of books has catapulted them to be community leaders of business, lawyers, doctors, politician's social workers and Teachers these people matter deeply to our community. It supports literacy, wellbeing and connection.

However, there are real challenges. The cost of running a small business continues to rise, while competition from large online retailers and Local corporations make it difficult to compete on price. For example this year Leading up to Christmas we saw one of the corporations reduce their whole range of their books & all there boxsets down to \$10 per item, Yes this is good for the consumer and the retailer made their money back with their buying power and the ability to sell other non-book items in their store at full price, and leading up to Mother's Day the same organisation have reduced all their books down to \$8.00 per item and we saw did immediate effect to our turnover since our call range is books,

At the same time, reading rates are declining, with many Australians not reading regularly and less adults promoting reading to children.

Without strong local bookshops to promote books which intern promotes reading and access to books and a reading culture in communities like mine becomes much more limited.

I support the calls from Australia Reads and the Australian Booksellers Association for the Government to invest in reading and support bookshops as cultural infrastructures.

I would like to see the National Cultural Policy include:

- National reading campaigns to encourage Australians of all ages to read more regularly
- Stronger investment in school libraries and support for educators and families to build reading habits
- Programs that improve access to books in the community, including author events, book clubs and local initiatives
- Promotion of Australian stories, including contemporary authors and First Nations voices

In addition, I support practical measures to strengthen bookshops, including:

- Where it is possible all Government organisations, Education Departments, Schools and libraries to buy locally from the community where services are available and they are drawing a benefit from the community instead of interstate, international markets or institutions that do not have a presence in the community, to assist regional bookstores to survive, Because of the density of the population in regional areas.
- The practice of where the use of the sale of Books is used as a loss leader in such a fashion that is not illegal but harmful to small business as referred to the above examples.
- A Bookselling Tax Offset to help cover key operating costs
- Funding for in-store events and community programs
- Support for training and career pathways in bookselling
- Fairer market conditions, including looking at pricing and discounting practices
- An Australian Book Voucher Program to encourage children and families to buy books locally

For example,

In 2010 we started **The HEALTHY KIDS' PROGRAMME**

We had been providing free of charge \$5 Gift Certificates to Sporting Organisations and Schools to encourage healthy bodies and healthy minds in the region's children. The programme began in June 2010 with support of the Junior Netball, Football, and Soccer clubs. Due to the positive response of Coaches, Players, and Parents, it was

expanded to include literacy-based awards in Primary Schools. This ended in 2018. The demand for the program outstripped our ability to continue the program and in the final years of the program, we had gifted over 27000 in total \$5 Gift Certificates to grassroots sporting organisations, literacy programs in schools and kindergartens within the Golden Valley. The vouchers were used by Children this gave them the ability to purchase a book up to \$5.00 or \$5.00 off a book of the Child's choice, which was very motivating and inspiring for the younger readers.

Bookshops like ours play an important role in our communities. We provide access to books, support Australian authors and create spaces where people can connect.

With the right support, we can continue to do this work and ensure that reading remains a strong part of Australian life.

Kind regards,

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Collins Booksellers Shepparton

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