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Office for the Arts

Submission to the National Cultural Policy 2026

For creative cultural policy that supports and respects arts and culture workers

Thank you for this opportunity to advocate for writers, for books and for literature, and for valuing the input of working writers and artists in developing cultural policy.

I am a writer based in Yartapuulti (Port Adelaide), on Kaurna land. I recently published my sixth book, *Salvage*. I have been supporting myself as a novelist with freelance work in arts and media for the past two decades, mainly via freelance writing. In that time I have seen increased concentration in the publishing industry, shrinking opportunities, and stagnant or falling incomes, with recommended rates of pay unevenly applied across the sector.

I was a freelance delegate at MEAA for some years, working to support freelancers in arts and media settings to win fair pay and better conditions. I have been a Director of the Australian Society of Authors since 2022 and last year I became the Chair of this organisation. I support all of the more detailed policy proposals in the ASA's separate submission, and many of MEAA's. I am writing this, my own submission, as I feel it's also of value to share my perspective as an individual author.

In 2025 I was awarded the Creative Australia Fellowship for Literature. I have received project grants before, but this fellowship has been life-changing in terms of releasing me, albeit temporarily, from the precarity that is considered normal for most writers and artists in Australia. I am firmly committed to ensuring that Australia does more to support writers and artists at every stage of their careers.

Much has changed since the announcement of *Revive*, but the precarity of most working writers remains a reality. Writers I know are burning out, giving up creative practice in favour of a day job, moving out of cities, or leaving Australia in search of better opportunities and support systems overseas. Younger writers are frustrated by the challenges of this industry before they begin, and often saddled with debt simply from learning their craft. Older writers are increasingly exhausted, with no sick leave or superannuation to rely on. If anything, we face additional pressures, including the rising cost of living, censorship of our work and events, and the theft of our work by big tech companies for use in AI. We still need more funding for literature and better working conditions for writers. We also need stronger and braver institutions that support our work, a culture of respect for all voices, the right to freedom of expression, and proper enforcement of fair pay and copyright.

Fortunately, these are not intractable problems; there are many ways to make change, and we know a lot about what works. I warmly welcome the establishment of Writing Australia and look forward to working with them to build on improvements to funding for writers in coming years. Most writers are not yet seeing the benefits of increased funding, and direct funding of writers should remain a major priority in cultural policy.

AI and copyright enforcement (AI theft)

Like many in the creative professions, I have been experiencing shock and dismay as my work has been stolen for use in AI training. These thefts have taken place overseas, and as an author published in Australia I have not benefited from any court settlements in the US or elsewhere. Like many writers, I very much welcomed the line drawn in the sand in October 2025 by Attorney-General Michelle Rowland, confirming that there will be no Text and Data Mining exemption for tech companies. Writers hoped that this would result in tech companies quickly offering some form of compensation for AI theft. Instead, powerful tech industry lobbyists continue to argue for copyright to be weakened instead of respected. These companies promise productivity and profit, but their entire business is built on the back of stealing from creators. We deserve our fair share.

I am yet to receive any requests from AI companies to license my work, and my understanding is that few authors or publishers have been offered such agreements. Macmillan, my current publisher's parent company, is now part of a class action suit

against Meta in the USⁱ. Even if they are successful, writers like me will be waiting long years before we see a cent, while our industry shrinks away around us.

Australia is not doing enough to hold tech companies to account for thefts that have already taken place, or to ensure tech companies pay fairly in future. **Copyright enforcement and compensation** need to be a priority.

This is a time of great risk for Australian culture, but it should also be an opportunity for creators to share in the benefits of new technology. Multiple mechanisms to hold tech companies accountable must be implemented, since there are multiple ways in which their activities threaten our livelihoods.

A key pillar of *Revive*, 'the centrality of the artist,' stated that creators are entitled to fair payment for our labour. Tech companies must pay fairly for their use of our work at every stage of the process.

I support the call for a temporary scheme that could partially compensate creators for some of the thefts that have already taken place. However, such a scheme on its own is inadequate to fully cover the past, current and future use of authors' work. Ongoing licensing arrangements are also needed to ensure our copyright is not violated in future. As licensing is negotiated and lawsuits continue to emerge, government has a role to play in supporting authors while ensuring compliance and enforcement of Australia's highly regarded copyright regime.

Given the above context, OFTA's disclosure that AI will be used to process our submissions to the National Cultural Policy demonstrates a lack of understanding of the effects of AI on creators and the sector, and can only erode confidence in the government's capacity or willingness to deal with this issue.

Freedom of expression

I have been affected by several of the many recent attacks on freedom of artistic expression.

For example, the cancellation of this year's Adelaide Writers Week was a significant blow for authors here on Kurna land. We lost income from events, connection with

audiences and each other, and trust in the institutions that are meant to make space for books, writers, and ideas. Censorship of this sort has a chilling effect, and it damages relationships and structures.

Though this was a State government issue, the loss of trust has been repeated across the country by many types of institutions, including festivals, publishers, libraries, universities, and even Creative Australia itself. The situation is deeply demoralising. It is, in part, a symptom of the vulnerability caused by long-term funding insecurity. But funding alone is not enough to protect our rights.

Literary culture informs political culture, and vice versa. Cultural policy should consider more explicit protections for freedom of expression, and how we build more accountable institutions. At present, 'safety' and 'social cohesion' are being used as bywords for the kind of polite silence that is antithetical to a healthy arts ecosystem and a healthy democracy.

In the case of Adelaide Writers Week, a community-led festival named Constellations/Not Writers Week was very quickly built from the ground up to reclaim some of what was lost. A small collective of writers, publishers, booksellers and local organisations were able to stage alternative events and ensure the public had access to valuable discussions. Our DIY festival was a triumph, but it also illustrated just how much arts and culture relies on the unpaid labour of dedicated volunteers and other donations in order to function at all. Nothing about this is sustainable.

Two of the stated intentions of *Revive* were to 'strengthen cultural infrastructure' and to 'restore the principle of arms-length funding'. There has been some ground made on these issues as far as Creative Australia is concerned, but even there lobbying and political interference have been an issue. I note that our present Venice Biennale representatives were only able to fulfil their commission after a groundswell of support from artists and communities defended their participation. Work remains to ensure that our entire arts and culture infrastructure is confident and capable of protecting the rights of artists and writers.

Government should be showing better leadership on this issue in its own practices. Arts and culture workers should be involved in institutional reform, including anti-racist work, and take part in developing a Bill of Rights that ensures our right to freedom of artistic

expression is protected.

Support for the arts should take many forms – direct and indirect

Revive sought to resuscitate a struggling creative sector, and began by recognising the value of our work. I appreciate the shift in support for arts and culture that *Revive* represented and some of the institutional changes that have been made, including the establishment of Creative Workplaces, Music Australia and Writing Australia. The increased support for First Nations led creative practice is particularly welcome.

More can be done both within and outside these bodies to support arts and culture workers. Happily, these changes would benefit many sectors of society currently struggling with precarious work arrangements and the rising cost of living. Indeed, support for arts and culture benefits everyone.

Direct funding for writers at every stage of our career is essential and should be prioritised. Early career funding is particularly valuable, investing in the next generation of writers where they are in most need. Established writers need funding that is longer term, such as three-year fellowships. These should be equivalent to an average wage and oriented to supporting writers, not projects.

Top up lending rights – this is a significant source of remuneration for writers and the quickest and simplest way to support published authors across the country.

More fellowships

In 2025, I was one of two authors awarded the Creative Australia Fellowship for Literature. This prestigious fellowship has been life changing. In two decades of writing full time and freelancing to support my creative practice, this is the first year that my income has been higher than the minimum wage (and I am a successful and established author). It has allowed me to claim a degree of financial and housing security. I can focus on my creative practice and choose the kinds of work I do.

The fellowship allows me to prioritise working for creative and social value, rather than immediate financial need. My health and wellbeing have improved because of this change, and it has greatly increased my capacity to support others, take part in community-led projects, and engage in advocacy. It has enabled my role as Chair of the

ASA, my participation in organising Constellations/Not Writers Week, and countless smaller acts of support for other writers and artists. Like most artists, when I have spending money I spend it on books, music, art, gigs, films, and theatre, which in turn enrich my own practice.

The benefit of a fellowship is not just to the individual artist but to the culture as a whole. It is obvious to me that these fellowships should be made available, not to one or two writers a year, but to dozens.

The artist as worker

The 'centrality of the artist' and the promise of recognising the 'artist as worker' represented a welcome conceptual shift in *Revive*, reflecting the reality of our working lives. Most of us are not earning enough from our work, supporting ourselves with multiple jobs, and struggling with the cost of living just like other workers. As sole traders we lack the rights that attach to employees and access to benefits other workers take for granted, including superannuation on freelance/contract work. This government has made positive change in regulating the gig economy elsewhere, but it hasn't been adequately applied to arts and culture work.

Most writers are earning well below the poverty line. ASA standard rates of pay are unevenly enforced. Our tax and superannuation system is confusing and inconsistent. I remain a small business for some purposes and a worker for others. Superannuation is a particular challenge, with a lack of clarity for freelancers and the organisations that hire us. I welcome the addition of Creative Workplaces, a body which is able to advise on standard rates and conditions, to Creative Australia. But it can only advise us on our circumstances, not change them.

Legislated minimum rates and enforceable standards are basic expectations of all workers in our society. If we intend to treat artists and writers as workers, then we should adopt enforceable minimum standards for freelance work.

Tax reform to support arts and culture workers would offset some of the difficulties in slipping between the cracks of employee and small business. Considerations for tax reform should include **a tax free threshold for creative income** similar to the scheme that exists in Ireland. I support tax offsets for independent bookshops that support Australian authors, and other tax incentives that encourage reading and the buying of

books.

At minimum, fellowships, grants, and prizes awarded to artists and writers should be considered tax exempt. Paying tax on fellowships and grants adds unnecessary burdens and complications to what should be the simplest form of support.

Indirect funding for writers

As well as the above forms of direct funding for writers, we should be supporting the systems that support artists and writers.

This should start with broad **welfare reform** that understands and celebrates creative work, instead of the current punitive system. Raise the rate of JobSeeker, recognise creative practice as work, and remove so-called 'mutual obligation' for all.

I applaud the recognition of freelance and artistic work in meeting current income support obligations, but note that this recognition does not include creative practice itself. An increase in the rate of JobSeeker and removing so-called 'mutual obligation' would better support emerging artists, those taking time to work on their craft, and those who are experiencing periods of burnout or change.

Core funding for essential infrastructure including writers centres, literary journals, artist-run initiatives, small publishers, festivals and other organisations that support literature and employ writers. Such funding must be conditional on fair pay.

Matched Federal and State funding for **artists in public schools** around the country. Residencies and supported author visits, paid at standard rates, to ensure all public school students have equal access to arts education.

Increased and ongoing **support for reading**, public libraries, teacher librarians, and via school curriculum, including via content quotas for Australian books at schools.

Abolish the misguided Job Ready Graduates program. Ensure that more TAFEs are funded to offer Certificate IV in Creative Writing and other creative courses, which are far more accessible to students than university and also employ practitioners as educators.

Local content quotas in broadcasting, streaming, and better support pathways for the adaptation of Australian stories for film and television.

Cultural policy should be creative.

Artists are experts in experimental, collaborative, creative practices. Cultural policy should reflect the way we work and embrace a wide range of possibility.

Like many writers and artists, I support the implementation of a **basic income** for artists. Many submissions asked for this during the last round of consultations, which *Revive* acknowledged. There has been no movement to implement this model in Australia, not even by supporting a small-scale pilot program.

The evidence for the value of this model has only grown. Ireland recently made its Basic Income for Artists scheme permanent after the pilot's success, calculating a return of €1.39 on each €1 of investment.ⁱⁱ Artists on the scheme “spent more time creating, produced more work, and spent less time trapped in unrelated jobs just to survive.”ⁱⁱⁱ

Creatives Rebuild New York gave guaranteed income directly to 2400 artists in New York from 2021-2024 and also found that artists were able to focus on their creative practice and their wellbeing improved.^{iv} Similar successful programs have been introduced elsewhere, including in Minnesota and San Francisco.

Australian artists and writers are experiencing low incomes and precarity during what is widely acknowledged to be a major housing crisis. Over twenty years ago, I left Sydney because I couldn't be a writer and afford the rent. This situation has significantly worsened, and we are now experiencing creative flight on a national scale, with artists and writers leaving our shores seeking a more affordable existence elsewhere.

Targeted housing support for arts and culture workers is vital.

Arts and culture are a public good; when arts and culture are cared for, everyone in society sees the benefit. But too often, arts and culture workers don't see the benefit of our work directly. We must be supported to do our best and share it. We need multiple forms of support to ensure better access for more participants, creative responses to the current challenges we face, and a healthier and stronger arts and culture ecosystem that everyone can enjoy.

Summary

AI and Freedom of Expression

1. Investigate the true impact of AI on artists, creative workers, and the culture as a whole
2. Develop a thorough response, recognising the value of our labour to tech companies and ensuring that we share in any benefits extracted from our work.
3. Acknowledge the present challenges to freedom of expression for artists. Defend arm's-length funding and protect the arts from political interference.
4. Engage arts and culture workers in reforms, including a Bill of Rights that enshrines protections for freedom of artistic expression.

Direct support

1. Enforce the shift to making all public funding for arts and cultural projects, at all levels, contingent on fair payment to artists.
2. Greatly increase the number of fellowships offered. Include specifically targeted funding, such as three-year fellowships for established authors, early career fellowships, and support for marginalised writers.
3. Top up the Public Lending Rights scheme to acknowledge the public value of books and support and protect Australian literature into the future.
4. Remove taxes on prizes and grants, set a tax-free threshold for creative income, and change superannuation and tax legislation to ensure working artists and writers are fairly covered by compulsory superannuation.

Indirect support

1. Strengthen the ecosystem for literature by ensuring core funding for literary journals, writers centres, independent publishers, festivals etc.
2. Invest in arts and culture as a public good by employing working artists and writers in schools through residencies, as part of literacy and reading initiatives, and in public libraries.
3. Ensure arts and culture careers are available to everyone. Abolish the failed Job Ready Graduates program. More TAFE places for Certificate IV in Creative Writing.
4. Invest in long-term ways to fund working artists and writers more sustainably, such as a Basic Income for the Arts scheme.
5. Raise the rate of JobSeeker, increase rent assistance, and abolish punitive mutual obligation requirements for artists who are out of work, and for everybody.
6. Invest in low cost housing for artists and writers to help stop attrition and creative flight.

- i <https://publishers.org/news/publishers-and-authors-file-class-action-lawsuit-against-meta-and-zuckerberg-for-willful-copyright-infringement-to-develop-llama-ai-models/>
- ii https://assets.gov.ie/static/documents/b87d2659/20250929_BIA_CBA_Final_Report.pdf
- iii <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2026/feb/10/ireland-basic-income-for-the-arts-scheme-becomes-permanent>
- iv https://www.creativesrebuildny.org/wp-content/uploads/2025/03/CRNY_GuaranteedIncomeForArtists_PreliminaryFindings_FINAL.pdf