

National Cultural Policy Submission

1469743

Public

Organisation

Paper Bird Bookshop

Short submission (text box 500 words or less)

Dear Minister Burke,

I am writing as a children's bookseller to urge the government to include meaningful support for local bookshops in the new National Cultural Policy.

My bookshop, Paper Bird, has operated in Fremantle for 10 years.

It's a specialist children's bookshop and arts centre focusing on the art of illustration, story telling and creative writing. We have an international following as a destination bookshop with a famous Narnia wardrobe leading into a secret room for Indigenous literature, and an annual Illustration Exhibition in partnership with publisher, Thames & Hudson.

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 department stores.

This year we will see the closure of WA's premier independent bookshop, Boffins, in the Perth CBD that has been running for 37 years and will leave a huge hole in our cultural landscape. In Fremantle, on the High Street, another bookshop, The Chart & Map Shop, has gone into liquidation. It feels like independent bookshops have become an endangered species. The pressures of keeping the cost of books down while overheads and wages keep rising has a massive impact on bookshops keeping afloat.

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 support local bookshops as cultural infrastructure, creating audience engagement:


- Establish an Australian Independent Bookshop Tax Offset (AIBTO): a refundable tax rebate on core operating expenses including wages, rent, and capital expenditure would deliver significant cultural and economic returns.
- Fund establishment of a skills training and certification program development and delivery to professionalise the industry, creating recognised career pathways
- Enable accessibility to books and bookshops for all Australians. Study pricing and discounts; examine the feasibility of restrictions on deep discounting of new-release Australian titles, aligned with established European models, and investigate the case for GST reduction or exemption on books, consistent with international precedent.
- Support an Australian Book Voucher Program, redeemable at local bookshops nationwide, targeted at children or retirees. An existing mechanism for this recommendation is ABA Gift Cards, redeemable at bookshops Australia-wide and online.
- Support and expand ongoing grants for events in bookshops including author events, book clubs, workshops, story times, and other community programs. Grant funding in this space benefits audiences and authors and the wider community.

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I love being a bookseller, seeing the joy in connecting kids to stories and encouraging them to become life long readers.

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,

 Director of Paper Bird Bookshop

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