

National Cultural Policy Submission

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Individual

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Short submission (text box 500 words or less)

As an Australian who lives reading, I am grateful for the opportunity to contribute to the consultation process for the National Cultural Policy.

Our stories are fundamental to who we are as a nation.

I urge the Government to adopt the following key priorities:

1. Invest in targeted national reading campaigns to increase participation for adults, children, and young people.

Culturally and socially, reading serves as a powerful glue, connecting individuals to their communities and the wider world. Socially, it builds deep empathy by allowing readers to step into the shoes of characters from diverse backgrounds, thereby breaking down stereotypes and reducing societal polarisation. Culturally, literature preserves a society's history, values, and diverse voices, passing them down through generations. By creating shared stories and common conversations, reading transforms passive consumers into active participants in a unified, empathetic, and culturally rich society.

2. Equip schools to foster a reading culture by building and properly funding school libraries.

Currently, not every public school in Australia has a library. A school library staffed by a trained librarian is the intellectual hub of a school, vital for both academic success and digital survival. While a library provides equal access to books, technology, and quiet study spaces, a librarian provides the navigation system. As media literacy experts, trained librarians teach students how to critically evaluate online information and detect misinformation. Research consistently shows that schools with credentialed librarians have higher reading scores and academic achievement, making them irreplaceable partners in student success.

3. Support our community bookshops and local libraries.

Libraries and bookstores form the vital cultural and social backbone of our communities, serving as both equalisers of opportunity and hubs of local culture. Libraries act as democratic, free spaces that bridge the digital and educational divide by providing everyone, regardless of income, with free access to books, technology, and community workshops. Meanwhile, bookstores fuel a neighbourhood's creative and economic pulse as small businesses that curate unique collections, host author events, and keep money circulating locally. Together, this ecosystem transforms a neighbourhood from a collection of buildings into a connected, thinking community.

4. Provide dedicated support for regional and First Nations reading initiatives.

For regional and Australian First Nations communities, reading is vital for preserving cultural heritage, strengthening self-determination, and overcoming geographic isolation. Engaging with literature, especially by Indigenous creators, maintains unbroken storytelling traditions, revitalises language, and ensures young people see their identity proudly reflected. Simultaneously, books act as powerful educational equalisers in remote areas, bridging the literacy gap with urban centres. Fostering a strong reading culture empowers local voices and ensures Australia's diverse heritage thrives from the ground up.