

## National Cultural Policy Submission

1470076

Public

Individual

Paul O'Loughlin



Short submission (text box 500 words or less)

Prepared as a personal submission on the importance of reading as part of Australia's shared cultural life.

Coming home from work to see my children with books open is a moment of quiet pride. As a father, I understand that fostering a love of reading is not about immediate literacy; it is about lifelong cultural enrichment, through stories that help shape who we become, how we understand others, and how we participate in the world around us.

That small domestic moment captures something much larger. Reading is not just a requirement of the school curriculum, a diversion for a busy mind, or a simple, pleasant habit. It is one of the ways culture is transmitted. It gives children access to imagination, memory, empathy, humour, language, history and possibility. It gives adults a way to keep learning, reflecting and reconnecting with ideas beyond the demands of daily life.

For that reason, I believe the Australian Government should place books and reading at the centre of cultural policy. A national cultural strategy that takes reading seriously is not just investing in literacy outcomes, but is investing in the cultural confidence, civic empathy and creative life of the country.

I have seen what it means for men of my own age, through the Tough Guy Book Club, reconnect with books through a shared social setting. The value is not only in finishing a novel. It is in the conversations, the discipline of returning to reading, the rediscovery of attention, and the connection that forms when people gather around stories.

This matters because reading rates cannot be lifted by speaking only to children, or only to schools, or only to people who already identify as readers. Reading policy needs to reach across cohorts: children, teenagers, parents, working adults, older Australians, men who have drifted away from books, people in regional communities, and people who may not have grown up with easy access to reading culture. A strong reading culture is built across the whole life course.

I therefore urge the Government to focus on three priorities:

1. Lift national reading rates through a sustained public reading campaign
2. Properly fund school and public libraries as cultural infrastructure
3. Support Australian writers, publishers and bookshops to strengthen our national voice

Books and reading should sit at the centre of Australia's cultural policy. They are not simply educational tools or private entertainments. They are part of the shared cultural fabric of the country.

A serious national reading strategy would lift reading rates, strengthen libraries, support Australian writers and publishers, and build a more literate, imaginative and connected society. It would recognise that the benefits of reading are immediate, but also lifelong: not only literacy, but cultural enrichment, social connection and civic depth.

Australia needs more readers, more books in more hands, better-funded libraries, stronger support for Australian stories, and a renewed public commitment to reading as part of our shared culture.