

## Response to the National Cultural Policy Consultation

My name is Adele Walsh, and I write as a public library leader, a lifelong consumer of the arts, and someone who grew up in a regional community where access to culture was shaped by what could be shared, borrowed, and discovered locally.

Australia's next National Cultural Policy presents an important opportunity to recognise where cultural participation is already being sustained every day. Libraries, schools, and public institutions are where access happens, where participation begins, and where culture is lived, local, and ongoing.

The five pillars of *Revive* provide a strong foundation.

Recognising First Nations stories as central must remain a guiding principle. Ensuring a place for every story requires investment in diverse voices, including local, regional, and emerging creators. Supporting artists as workers is essential, alongside recognising the networks that connect creative work with communities. Strong institutions matter, but strength should not be defined solely by scale. Reaching audiences must go beyond distribution to removing barriers, building habits of engagement, and ensuring people see themselves reflected in cultural experiences.

Reading is one of the most important and most at-risk forms of cultural participation. As reading rates decline, too many Australians miss out on its lifelong benefits, from improved education outcomes to wellbeing, empathy, and social connection.

Libraries are central to addressing this challenge. We are not only places of access, but key delivery mechanisms for national priorities. We purchase and promote Australian books, films, music, and creative work at scale. We commission workshops, host events, and create platforms for authors and creators. We nurture joyful reading and participation, provide collections that reflect lived experience, and offer welcoming spaces for all.

Growing up regionally, reading was my first gateway into the arts. It expanded my world and shaped how I understand storytelling. That experience is no longer guaranteed, and that should concern us.

Despite this, libraries are often positioned as delivery partners rather than strategic contributors. We are relied upon to make cultural policy real but are rarely included in shaping it, and are not funded proportionally to our role. This policy presents an opportunity to change that.

To ensure all Australians can access the benefits of reading and cultural participation, the National Cultural Policy should include:

- National reading campaigns supporting adults, children, and young people

- A library in every school, with professional staff and resourced collections
- Greater community access to books and authors through touring and programs
- Strong promotion of Australian stories, including contemporary and First Nations voices
- Recognition of libraries as core cultural partners, with sustained investment and a role in policy design

Culture is not only something we preserve. It is something we are constantly creating. Libraries see this every day in local authors, community storytelling, and young people exploring creative forms.

A national cultural policy should not only celebrate the past. It must actively enable what is emerging.

Kind regards,  
Adele Walsh