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My name is Ellie Marney, I am an award-winning and internationally bestselling author of both YA and adult crime novels, with a 13-year career in the industry. I am a *New York Times* bestseller, with a 14-book catalogue, and I am published by both Australian and US publishers, as well as having rights sold into European and Asian territories, and screen options sold to US development teams. I teach and speak regularly at writers festivals both locally and overseas (my last festival appearance was at Singapore Writers Festival in November 2025), in schools and libraries (both in Australia, and overseas via Zoom), and through local writers' centres. I am a member of Sisters in Crime Australia, and I was an integral part of the #LoveOzYA campaign, to promote and advocate for Australian YA writing, that began in 2015 and was adopted by publishing professionals nationwide.

For much of my career, I have worked very hard to make an equitable living, while juggling parenting and other non-writing work (I am a trained high school teacher). It has only been in the last 3 years, as my children have grown and left home, that I've had the financial capacity to write full time.

You have no doubt heard from other authors and sources about how author finances function. Each book I sell brings me an advance on royalties that equates to approximately one third to one half of the annual wage of a part-time teaching job – while my books are commercial bestsellers, and some authors get lucky with big-money deals, the average author advance is usually quite modest. Some of my advance money goes to my literary agent who handles the sale, some goes to tax, and the rest I eke out until I begin to make royalties, which may or may not arrive, depending on the book's commercial success (which is largely dependent on the publisher). For each book sold, I earn approximately 8-10% of the RRP, so it can take many years for a book to begin providing a royalty stream. Until then, I must try to write and sell another book, preferably as quickly as possible, in order to pay bills. Foreign and media rights sales are always welcome, but again, are usually modest (my last foreign rights sale earned me approximately \$3500AU). Speaking gigs and events, and Copyright/Lending Rights payments, help supplement the money I earn from actual book-writing.

With a large back catalogue of books, you can squeak through. But I haven't contributed to my superannuation, for instance, since I quit teaching 3 years ago. I do not take holidays. I do not get sick pay. I am not represented by a formal union.

This is my experience, as a comparatively high-earning, multi-book-deal-making, internationally-known and bestselling commercial author with a lauded career. As a

consequence of my experience, I've formed the opinion that the Australian cultural industry and environment is not supportive of writing, or making a living from writing. In fact, I would go so far as to say that my much-lauded career has developed and progressed *in spite of* the obstacles I've faced within Australia, rather than because of any encouragement or support I've received from the environment here.

Book writing has traditionally received very little in the way of support from the Australian government. For all that we mark books like "Seven Little Australians", and "My Brother Jack", and "My Brilliant Career", and "Possum Magic" (or more recently, "The Dry", and "Big Little Lies" and "Cloudstreet" and "The Slap") on the Australian cultural map, and consider them an important part of our country's cultural backbone, we don't actually do much of anything to encourage or assist the people who create such work.

And it is, most assuredly, *work* – writing a book takes months of painstaking labour (yes, even to write a commercial genre fiction book, like a crime novel) and many many hours of the author's time. For much of my career, that work has had to be financially supported by *additional* work that has made it possible for me and my family to live.

You will no doubt have read or heard the statistics by now – about how literature is the only major artform not to have a national funding framework through Australia Council. How funding for literature has declined by 40% over the last decade, with only 2.4% of the total 2020-21 Australia Council arts investment spent on literature. My work/artform is the lowest of the low, sitting on the absolute bottom rung of the funding ladder for major artforms. (Over my career, I've received exactly one Creative Victoria grant to support the writing of a book. I applied for many other grants – but after a while, I gave up applying, because it took hours of work to create an application that seemed wildly unlikely to get me any support, when I could have spent that time writing another book. That grant-assisted book bombed, by the way – it still hasn't made any royalties. And I had to pay tax on the grant.)

Anyway, all this to say that making a go of a writing career in Australia is more than challenging – it's nearly impossible. And now we have to deal with AI tech companies stealing our work for their LLM training. Every single one of my books has been hoovered up for this purpose, and I have not received any form of acknowledgement, let alone compensation. This isn't just an individual-author issue: local publishers have been suffering with this as well, and margins in the publishing industry are already so tight, that a number of local publishers have already had to consolidate, sell out, or go under.

I am grateful for the initiatives introduced in *Revive* to assist with the sustainability of author and illustrator careers. However, since the introduction of *Revive*, authors have been facing increasingly precarious conditions. Without immediate support, we risk the viability of the book industry in Australia.

Which is fine, if you don't *want* a book industry. One thing I was made aware of, when I was involved with the #LoveOzYA campaign, is how many international buy-ins there are on bookstore shelves. In 2015, for every Australian YA book, for instance, there were at least 9-10 US books on the shelves. Maybe the Australian government is happy for Australians to simply get all their books and cultural influences from, say, America. But wouldn't it be good if we could encourage more local readers, who might like to see themselves and their

experiences in the books they read? Or if we could, perhaps, encourage young Australians to think “I would like to write my own story like that” and give them pathways to do so?

It’s not simply about a chance to tell a story, either: It’s who gets to write those stories. I come from a working class background – my father was a prison guard and my mother was a homemaker. Reaching “full time writer” status has been a significant milestone. But I am one of the only working class writers I know. If literature becomes a pastime only for the wealthy, those who can afford to take the time they need to write, then we’re only telling Australian stories seen through a very narrow lens.

As a country, we applaud our literary icons and we flag-wave for our Australian literary classics. But what future classics will we produce without support? What will the Australian story be without literature? At the end of the day, the stories of a country are the stories we tell ourselves about who we are.

So, I am calling for the next Australian cultural policy to deliver:

Direct investment in authors and illustrators via:

- Multi-year fellowships supporting mid-career authors by providing them with time to write.
- Seed money for emerging writers.
- A top up to the Lending Rights budget.
- A basic income pilot, involving 300 authors.

Investment in First Nations-led writing and publishing.

Solutions to the unprecedented theft of Australian authors’ work by multinational tech companies operating within Australia. For instance:

- Transparency on copyright inputs for, and outputs from, generative AI models.
- Research into the impact of generative AI on creative careers and Australian cultural output.
- Structural solutions to bring multinational AI companies to the licensing table with Australian rightsholders.

Tax reform to support author careers including tax-free literary prizes and grants, and a tax-free threshold for writers and illustrators.

Adequate resourcing for Writing Australia to deliver:

- Increased coordination between federal and state funding.
- Commissioning of critically-needed research to provide baseline data from which to measure impact for the book industry.
- Express guarantees included in every funding grant, ensuring that:
 - Authors and illustrators engaged in funded projects will be paid at, or above, ASA recommended rates
 - Generative AI will not be used to replace or diminish the role of human creators in government-funded projects.
- Coordination of a book-to-screen pipeline.

Commitment to educational interventions that support Australian authors and writing careers:

- Nationwide authors-in-schools program funded out of education budgets.
- Reversal of the failed Job-Ready Graduates program.

These policy ideas are all cribbed from the submission of the Australian Society of Authors (ASA), of which I am a member. Some are more important to me than others (I underlined those ones), but they are all pretty basic asks. I would also like to see more funding for state writers centres – at present, I live in the only state in Australia that does not have a funded writers centre, in a city which is supposed to be an International City of Literature, which you have to admit is a bit ridiculous. I also support the book industry submission by Books Create Australia, because god knows the book industry in this country is doing it equally tough, and without them, Australian authors don't have anything much left.

I would like to think that these submissions and their requests will receive a fair hearing, and that writers may, one day, have their needs addressed. That writing for a living need not be some impossible dream, and that other working class people like myself could envisage doing it. That being an author would involve less financial precarity, and less cynicism about what Australian culture really values (Footy = great! Writing = forget it)

I think this National Cultural Policy Consultation could just be window-dressing, so it looks like you're interested, when actually the funding arrangements are already done. I actually don't expect much to come from it.

My cynicism is high, and my expectations are low. But you could always prove me wrong.

Yours sincerely,
Ellie Marney