

Dear Minister Burke,

My name is Cindy O'Neill, and I am the owner of Collins Booksellers in Echuca. My store has been part of the local community for over 30 years, employing 3 and serving readers across the Echuca/Moama region.

Bookshops are not just retail businesses. They are cultural spaces where people discover stories, connect with ideas and engage with their community. In my store, we see this every day through conversations with customers, children discovering books, and local events such as authors visiting our town and having events in our store, we also support our local primary schools and kindergartens.

Reading matters deeply to our community. It supports literacy, wellbeing and connection.

However, there are real challenges. The cost of running a small business continues to rise, while competition from large online retailers makes it difficult to compete on price. At the same time, reading rates are declining, with many Australians not reading regularly.

Without strong local bookshops, access to books and reading culture in communities like mine becomes much more limited.

I support the calls from Australia Reads and the Australian Booksellers Association for the Government to invest in reading and support bookshops as cultural infrastructure.

I would like to see the National Cultural Policy include:

- National reading campaigns to encourage Australians of all ages to read more regularly
- Stronger investment in school libraries and support for educators and families to build reading habits
- Programs that improve access to books in the community, including author events, book clubs and local initiatives
- Promotion of Australian stories, including contemporary authors and First Nations voices

In addition, I support practical measures to strengthen bookshops, including:

- A Bookselling Tax Offset to help cover key operating costs
- An Australian Book Voucher Program to encourage children and families to buy books locally
- Funding for in-store events and community programs
- Support for training and career pathways in bookselling
- Fairer market conditions, including looking at pricing and discounting practices

Bookshops like mine play an important role in our communities. We provide access to books, support Australian authors and create spaces where people can connect.

With the right support, we can continue to do this work and ensure that reading remains a strong part of Australian life.

Kind regards,

Cindy O'Neill
Owner/Manager
Collins Booksellers Echuca