

Dear Minister Burke,

I am writing with regards to the development of a new National Cultural Policy.

I am a publishing professional and my submission will focus support for the publishing and bookselling sector, although there is definitely crossover with other artistic disciplines.

Support for independent bookshops

I urge the government to include meaningful support for local bookshops in the new National Cultural Policy.

Local bookshops are not merely retail businesses. They are cultural infrastructure - community gathering places where Australian stories are discovered, where children fall in love with reading, and where literary careers begin. Yet every year bookshops close, undermined by online giants and discount chains that sell books at 40–50% below recommended retail price. Australia lags behind comparable countries in protecting its book retail sector. France, Italy, the UK, Germany, and more have introduced proven measures – discount caps, tax offsets, and rates relief – that have stabilised their independent bookshop sectors. Australia should do the same. I support the Australian Booksellers Association's call to:

- Fund establishment of a skills training and certification program development and delivery to professionalise the industry, creating recognised career pathways.
- Establish an Australian Independent Bookshop Tax Offset (AIBTO): a refundable tax rebate on core operating expenses including wages, rent, and purchases of Australian-authored titles.
- Examine the feasibility of restrictions on deep discounting of new-release Australian titles, aligned with established European models.
- Investigate the case for GST reduction or exemption on books, consistent with international precedent.
- Invest in refreshing legacy data systems across the Australian book supply chain.
- Support an Australian Book Voucher Program, redeemable at local bookshops nationwide.
- Fund ongoing grants to support bookshop event delivery including author events, book clubs, workshops, story times, and other community programs.

Local bookshops are irreplaceable - but without support, more will close. The measures proposed by the ABA are modest, internationally proven, and would deliver significant cultural and economic returns.

A library for every school

A renewed national cultural policy must reinvest in school libraries, with the aim of all Australian schools having a and resourcing them (given 20% of schools currently operate with a \$0 annual library budget and 43% on less than \$1,000 per year. School libraries offer students a sanctuary and access to books that they may not otherwise have due to financial or logistical reasons. In a country with falling literacy rates, our children's education and future relies on access to quality literature and a key part of the solution lies in having well-resourced libraries at all schools, both from a materials and a staffing perspective.

Investment in a place for every story and equal access to art across disciplines

Australia is a signatory to several core international human rights treaties. Our right to enjoy and benefit from culture is contained in Article 27 of the [International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights \(ICCPR\)](#) and Article 15 of the [International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights \(ICESCR\)](#). Australia has also ratified the [Convention on the Rights of the Child \(CRC\)](#), of which Article 13 protects the [right of expression and information for children](#).

Our rights to cultural participation and freedom of expression stem from these commitments (though our laws only enshrine where those rights are limited – such as [legal restrictions on hate speech](#)). However, not all Australians have equal access to these essential and enshrined human rights. In fact, since the launch of Revive, several of these rights have been lost or restricted, or are still actively under attack.

Addressing these inequities will require the strategic removal of barriers to ensure everyone can participate in art and culture. But equity doesn't come from treating everybody equally, it comes from providing whatever is needed to give everyone an equal experience. This includes **equity of access for all locations, all art forms, at all scales, and all points of engagement**.

A renewed national cultural policy must continue to **work in concert with State, Territory and Local Governments to extend access to all Australians**, regardless of where we live or what we can afford. This includes initiatives and investment to **address the ongoing disparities between cities and regional areas, and between Sydney/Melbourne and everywhere else**.

This response cannot be entirely digital, given more than two million Australians aren't online and the digital divide between those with the highest and lowest levels of income, education and employment is widening, not shrinking, over time. So, while we need to continue to **invest in digital and hybrid work**, we must do so while simultaneously **addressing digital inequality** for artists, participants and audiences,

and **reducing the digital divide between organisations** (by considering how we can share technology, skills or capacity).

Most inclusion and diversity initiatives tend to focus on audiences, but our sector's overall monoculture will persist until we **improve access and representation at all points of engagement – from audiences and participants, to artists and cultural workers, leaders, board-members and policy makers** (and everyone in between).

Self-determined, community-led and [community-engaged practice](#) should be prioritised to ensure Australia's arts and cultural organisations are safe for, led by and showcase the authentic, lived experiences of the artist and communities they serve (especially those from under-represented groups).

Those organisations that demonstrate a commitment to community-led practice at both governance and executive levels should be **supported and compensated for the additional costs and cultural labour that comes from lived experience**. Those that don't should be required to demonstrate how organisations are **improving accessibility, representation and cultural safety** (such as [Chairs and CEOs who lack relevant lived experience replacing themselves with leaders that do](#)).

Finding a place for every story cannot stop at cultural policy. The Albanese Government must address its reputation for rushed and un-evidenced legislative change *and* its reputation for damaging and '[disrespectful](#)' delays to the evidence it requests and receives (with more than 100 parliamentary committee reports currently overdue – some by [as much as two years](#)).

It must also reconsider and redress the impact of those decisions by **rescinding or reimagining last year's [rushed and poorly-informed speech suppression laws](#)** that have already led to unfair and inconsistent artistic censorship. As the only liberal democracy without its own constitutional or statutory bill of rights, the Australian Government must also **adopt the long-delayed [national human rights act](#)**.

Put in safeguards to protect freedom of expression

At last count, 66 Australian arts and cultural organisations initiatives and groups have been accused of many more instances of censoring, threatening or otherwise harming their own artists, cultural workers or audiences between 2023 and 2026 alone (on top of many others harmed by those outside our sector).

This has not only happened in the time of Revive, but been explicitly enacted by Premiers, Ministers and statutory authorities (amongst others) – making hypocrites of policy makers, funders and cultural organisations, and increasing the risks they hoped their actions would avoid.

Prioritisation of such problematic and inconsistent definitions of 'social cohesion' over organisational purpose and basic human rights must be immediately stopped and reversed – and its devastating impacts repaired.

Freedom of expression is vital in a well-functioning democracy and protection of this freedom, in the arts and everywhere, is paramount.

Thank you for considering this submission. I look forward to a new policy that is robust, informed and will pave the way for an exciting new chapter in the arts sector that will benefit all Australians.

Best,

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Publishing professional and avid supporter of the arts