

## National Cultural Policy Submission

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Public

Individual

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Short submission (text box 500 words or less)

I welcome the opportunity to contribute to this consultation. As an Australian reader, and someone who has spent decades working alongside children, young people, and families navigating some of life's hardest moments, I know firsthand how profoundly stories shape who we are, individually and as a nation.

If Australia is serious about a National Cultural Policy that means something, books and reading need to be at its centre. Here is what I think matters most.

1. Invest in national reading campaigns that actually reach people.

Reading does something no algorithm can replicate. It builds genuine empathy, connects people across difference, and holds our shared history. When people read, they stop being passive consumers of culture and start participating in it. A well-resourced, sustained national reading campaign, one that includes adults, not just children, would be a meaningful investment in social cohesion at a time when we need it badly.

2. Fund school libraries properly, and staff them with trained librarians.

Not every public school in Australia has a library. That is not acceptable. A school library staffed by a credentialed librarian is the intellectual engine of a school. It provides equal access to books and technology, and critically, it gives students a skilled guide through the noise of the internet. Librarians teach media literacy. They help kids distinguish credible information from misinformation. The research is consistent: schools with qualified librarians produce stronger readers and higher academic outcomes. This is not a nice-to-have.

3. Back our community bookshops and local libraries.

Libraries and independent bookshops are not luxuries. They are the social and cultural infrastructure of communities. Libraries give everyone, regardless of income, free access to books, technology, and connection. Bookshops keep local creative economies alive. They curate, they host, they build neighbourhood identity. Together they turn a collection of streets into a community that thinks, shares, and belongs. They deserve dedicated government support.

4. Prioritise regional and First Nations reading initiatives.

For regional and remote communities, and for First Nations Australians, reading carries particular weight. Literature by Indigenous creators sustains storytelling traditions, revitalises language, and ensures young people see themselves reflected in the stories their country tells about itself. In remote areas, books are also powerful educational equalisers. A cultural policy serious about equity cannot treat these communities as an afterthought. Investment here is investment in self-determination, heritage, and the long-term strength of the whole country.