

Office for the Arts
Department of Infrastructure, Transport,
Regional Development, Communications and the Arts
GPO Box 594 | CANBERRA ACT 2601

[REDACTED]

20 May 2025

Thank you for the opportunity to contribute to a new national cultural policy.

I am a biographer and my first book was *Elizabeth Macarthur: A life at the edge of the world* (Text Publishing, 2018). I am also the co-writer, with Torres Strait Islander actor, producer and SBS board member Aaron Fa'Aoso, of Aaron's memoir *So Far, So Good* (Pantera, 2022) and a middle-grade novel, *Spirit of the Crocodile* (Allen & Unwin 2025). I am currently writing a biography of Louisa Lawson—farmer, feminist, publisher, and mother of Henry—for publication by Text in 2027. My research is supported by Creative Australia and a Visiting Scholar appointment at the [REDACTED]

As well as the above I have – and have always had – a four-day-a-week day job. Currently, I write for a leading Australian law firm; one of the few industries willing to pay an experienced writer what they are worth.

I need the day-job because despite my books selling well, despite continuing offers from publishing houses to write for them, my average annual earnings from writing (including grants) amount to just under \$25,000. With a few very rare and therefore notable exceptions, there is little or no opportunity to make a living from writing in this country.

The precarity of writers is mirrored by the tight financial circumstances faced by Australian publishing houses and by independent booksellers.

And yet Australian stories matter.

Governments evidently know this to be true, because they invest millions in telling Australian stories on the screen. Why then, is so little similar investment made in creating, publishing and selling Australian stories on the page? In fostering and supporting the Australian publishing industry to a similar extent as the screen industry?

I am a member of the Australian Society of Authors (ASA) and fully support its submission, including:

- Direct investment in authors and illustrators.
- Investment in First Nations-led writing and publishing.
- Solutions to the unprecedented theft of Australian authors' work by multinational tech companies operating within Australia.
- Tax reform to support author careers.
- Increased resourcing for Writing Australia.
- Commitment to educational interventions that support Australian authors and writing careers.

In relation to that last point, in many Australian states it remains possible for a student to finish secondary school without ever being required to read a book by a female Australian author. Why this situation continues to exist is beyond comprehension.

In addition, I am calling for:

- Increased support for independent booksellers. Many create and support lively local communities of interest, investing in events to support local and visiting authors. Yet, as for-profit entities, they are usually ineligible for grants designed to build and enhance communities.
- Increased support for Australian publishers. They play a crucial role in Australian cultural life – every bit as important as Australian media producers – and must not be left to disappear, or to all be eaten up by overseas conglomerates.

Yours very sincerely

Michelle Scott Tucker