

May 19, 2026.

Dear Minister Bourke,

I am grateful for the opportunity to highlight the important role independent bookstores play in Australian communities. After a twenty-five-year career as the owner of [REDACTED], and the Founder of [REDACTED] I am deeply concerned about the future of these unique community businesses. I believe there is an urgent need to address the challenges these businesses face in securing sustainable futures.

Social Impact – [REDACTED]

The [REDACTED] began its life at [REDACTED]—an independent bookstore. What started in a single bookstore, supported by its local community and schools, quickly gained momentum. Other independent bookstores joined the effort, and the broader Australian book industry soon became involved. At the time, it felt like a Tsunami of enthusiasm and commitment, spreading from the local community to a national audience.

Since its inception, the [REDACTED] has delivered over one million books to remote Indigenous communities, published more than 150 books—many in First Languages—and worked with over 400 communities. In 2024, it received international recognition, winning the [REDACTED] to honour every child's right to literacy.

[REDACTED]

The significance of this work beginning in a community bookstore cannot be overstated.

Book Clubs and Author Events

[REDACTED]

Independent bookstores create everyday value through book clubs and author events, strengthening community connections and reducing social isolation. While small in scale, these activities have a profound social impact.

Not all bookstores run book clubs—they require time, planning, resources, and suitable space. Those that do, however, provide meaningful benefits. [REDACTED] ran over 30 book clubs annually for nearly three decades and hosted more than 1,000 author events for children and adults. Many events were not profitable; each one was a risk, but I believe they

were an essential part of our model, a positive action that supported authors, the publishing industry, and the local community of readers.

Independent bookstores support local economies, align with government priorities around education and social cohesion, and provide civilised public spaces where conversations flourish, friendships are formed, ideas are exchanged, and Australian authors are celebrated.

School Programs, Teacher Librarians, and Literacy

Independent bookstores play a vital role in fostering literacy and supporting schools. At [REDACTED] school programs focused on personal engagement with students, teachers, and librarians, alongside carefully curated book selections.

Key initiatives included:

- **Standing Orders:** Cartons of carefully chosen books curated by librarian-trained staff to ensure students receive high-quality, age-appropriate reading material.
- **Professional Development for Teacher Librarians:** High-level book clubs and workshops designed to enhance school literacy programs.
- **Bookchats for Teachers:** Networks for English teachers to explore and discuss new books for their students.

Our guiding principle was always to recommend *“the right book for the right child,”* fostering a love of reading and ensuring every student could find a story that resonated with them.

Testimonials from educators highlight the impact:

- *“This library just keeps getting better and better... I left it to the experts to get the best worldwide, and you’re doing it. Thank you.”*
- *“Our students are LOVING the [REDACTED] standing orders books... it’s excellent.”*
- *The TL book club at [REDACTED] is a beneficial space for sharing our knowledge and understanding of books. I am truly grateful for the opportunity to read carefully selected contemporary novels, to discuss them with a children’s book specialist and my peers, and to recommend them to my students and staff.*
- *As a new TL, I have gleaned volumes of information from my fellow TLs about books, libraries, cataloguing and best practice for promoting reading at schools. I find the book club a rich resource of experience.*
- *I have been working in the library since 2018 but have always felt that I didn’t know much about current YA/children’s books. [REDACTED] TL Bookclub is changing that. It’s improving my confidence in talking about YA/children’s fiction.*
- *Being part of the book club is forcing me to prioritise reading some YA/children’s lit. It’s forcing me to make time to do so (and that’s a good thing – as otherwise I probably wouldn’t).*
- *I love that I get to talk MG/YA books with others, and to network with TLs, I feel like I’m still slightly keeping my toes wet despite not working as a TL atm. I also appreciate that this impacts on the way I teach AP English classes - and am able to talk to students about reading. I’m rather appalled at how few English teachers actually read, especially books that their students read.*

Through these programs, independent bookstores contribute far beyond book sales—they actively nurture literacy, support educators, and inspire young readers, strengthening the social and cultural fabric of their communities.

Recommendations

I strongly endorse the Australian Booksellers Association’s proposal to establish a five-pillar policy framework and investment strategy. This initiative is vital for stabilising and supporting local bookshops:

1. **Community & Cultural Engagement:** Grants for cultural infrastructure and continuing author support programs.
2. **Access & Affordability:** Book vouchers for school students and tax relief on Australian books.
3. **Sustainability of Local Businesses:** Rate relief for bookshops and education grants.
4. **Supply Chain & Digital Innovation:** Investment in the book supply chain and a national online consolidated platform.
5. **Long-Term Growth & Resilience:** A certification program for professional development of the workforce.

Summary

Independent bookstores are civilised public spaces offering solace, reflection, and refuge. They do not discriminate; everyone is welcome. They are places where people can engage deeply with stories, ideas, knowledge, and culture.

In this way, independent bookstores are not merely commercial enterprises—they are vital community businesses that quietly and consistently contribute to the social and cultural fabric of Australia.

Finally, I would like to take this opportunity to thank you for the beautiful speech you delivered in Parliament in honour of David Malouf. Words carefully chosen, and truly celebrating his life and contribution to the arts.

He would no doubt be heartened to know that you are championing the cause of the bookshops that sell his work and support Australian writing and publishing.

Yours sincerely,

[Redacted signature]

[Redacted name]

[Redacted title]

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