

Office for the Arts
Department of Infrastructure, Transport,
Regional Development, Communications and the Arts
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I am a freelance illustrator and author. I work across picture books and middle grade fiction, and my practice depends entirely on the ability to sustain a creative career over the long term. Like many of my peers, I navigate the constant tension between creative work and financial precarity — taking on non-creative work to make ends meet, at the cost of time and energy that would otherwise go into writing and illustrating. The conditions facing Australian authors and illustrators have worsened significantly in recent years, and the decisions made in the next National Cultural Policy will have a direct impact on whether careers like mine remain viable.

I am grateful for the initiatives introduced in *Revive* to assist with the sustainability of author and illustrator careers. However, since the introduction of *Revive*, authors have been facing increasingly precarious conditions. Without immediate support, we risk the viability of the book industry in Australia.

I am calling for:

1. A basic income pilot for authors and illustrators. I strongly support the Australian Society of Authors' call for direct investment in authors and illustrators, including a pilot involving 300 participants. Ireland's Basic Income for the Arts pilot demonstrated that financial stability allows creative practitioners to dedicate genuine time to their practice, with measurable benefits for cultural output. I know firsthand how much creative capacity is lost to financial stress. A similar pilot in Australia would allow our authors and illustrators to produce work that reflects and enriches Australian culture. Without support, that work might not otherwise exist.
2. A library in every public school. Libraries are one of the most equitable cultural institutions we have. They put books, one of the earliest forms of culture we experience, into the hands of children regardless of their family's income. When school libraries are cut or left unstaffed, it is overwhelmingly children from disadvantaged backgrounds who lose access to culture and to the literacy skills that follow from it. Access to books in childhood is one of the strongest predictors of literacy, and literacy underpins participation in almost every aspect of public life. A national commitment to a library in every public school is not just a cultural investment. It's an investment in equity.
3. Sustained support for independent bookshops. Independent bookshops are community spaces, champions of local authors, and often the primary venue through which readers discover Australian writing. They deserve sustained support to help them remain viable, whether through direct funding, tax relief, or other policy mechanisms.

4. Strong and enforceable copyright protections for creators in the context of AI. The recent decision not to relax copyright restrictions to permit AI systems to train on creators' work without consent was the right one, but it needs to be backed by ongoing commitment. AI systems are already being used to replicate the styles, voices, and visual languages of working artists and authors without consent, credit, or compensation. I ask that the government commit to: consulting creators before making any future changes to copyright law as it relates to AI; ensuring existing copyright law is enforced in the context of AI training data; and exploring mechanisms that would require AI developers to obtain licences and provide fair compensation when using creative works. A National Cultural Policy that invests in authors and illustrators while leaving the door open to the unlicensed use of their work would be contradictory. Strong copyright protections are the foundation on which a sustainable creative economy depends.

Thank you for your consideration.