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I am a queer author living in Sydney whose award-winning work has been published globally. I have written three books for young adults: *The Flywheel*, which won the Ampersand Prize, *Amelia Westlake*, winner of the Readings Young Adult Book Prize and the NSW Premier's Ethel Turner Prize for Young Adult Fiction, and *Into the Mouth of the Wolf*, which won the Davitt Award for Young Adult fiction and was a Children's Book Council of Australia Older Readers Honour Book. My short fiction has been published in many journals and anthologies, including *The Griffith Review*, *Best Australian Stories* and *New Australian Fiction*. The focus of my fiction is the experience of being a queer Australian. My books are widely available in schools and public libraries.

Like so many of my writing colleagues, I am unable to make a living wage as a writer. My writing income averages \$15,000 per annum, which includes royalties, advances, lending rights, occasional prize money and school visits. I work a full time job in an unrelated field to support myself and my family. This means that my writing time is extremely limited. I write around the edges of my other commitments.

The Revive initiatives certainly assist in making writers' careers sustainable. However, the broader conditions for writers are worsening. Australia's book industry is at risk of extinction.

One thing I've observed in the eleven years since I published my first novel is that the writing community in Sydney is getting smaller. Many of my writing colleagues, especially younger writers, have moved out of the city to places where housing is cheaper, or they have given up writing altogether. I fear that our cities will soon become cultural vacuums – places too expensive for artists to survive on the meagre income they receive.

Australian stories are already under threat by a global book market. Queer stories in particular, are harder to publish at a profit, especially since the most recent book banning epidemic in the U.S. This matters for Australian writers because a U.S. publishing deal is often more lucrative than a local one.

I am calling for:

- **Direct investment in authors and illustrators** via:
 - Multi-year fellowships supporting mid-career authors by providing them with time to write.
 - Seed money for emerging writers.
 - A top up to the Lending Rights budget.
 - A basic income pilot, involving 300 authors.
- **Investment in First Nations-led writing and publishing.**
- **Solutions to the unprecedented theft of Australian authors' work by multinational tech companies** operating within Australia. For instance:
 - Transparency on copyright inputs for, and outputs from, generative AI models.
 - Research into the impact of generative AI on creative careers and Australian cultural output.
 - Structural solutions to bring multinational AI companies to the licensing table with Australian rightsholders.
- **Tax reform to support author careers** including tax-free literary prizes and grants, and a tax-free threshold for writers and illustrators.
- **Adequate resourcing for Writing Australia** to deliver:
 - Increased coordination between federal and state funding.
 - Commissioning of critically-needed research to provide baseline data from which to measure impact for the book industry.
 - Express guarantees included in every funding grant, ensuring that:
 - Authors and illustrators engaged in funded projects will be paid at, or above, ASA recommended rates
 - Generative AI will not be used to replace or diminish the role of human creators in government-funded projects.
 - Coordination of a book-to-screen pipeline.
- **Commitment to educational interventions that support Australian authors and writing careers:**
 - Nationwide authors-in-schools program funded out of education budgets.

In the talks I give to students, I tell them that I write stories for queer young people so that they can see themselves represented in fiction. To see oneself on the page operates as a kind of permission to be yourself in the world. It can help shape your identity and purpose. For the same reasons, it's important that we support Australian stories more broadly, in all their diversity, to continue to reach audiences.

Sincerely



Erin Gough