



22 May 2026

Dear Minister Burke,

Re: Australia's National Cultural Policy

I am writing as a bookseller to urge the government to include meaningful support for local bookshops in the new National Cultural Policy.

My business, Farrells Bookshop, has operated in Mornington Victoria, about an hour south-east of Melbourne on the beautiful Mornington Peninsula, for 48 years – an impressive legacy for any retail business, but especially for a bookshop in a small regional community. We are a significant part of our community – considered a local institution by many – and we strive to share our passion for books and reading through quality customer service and specialised knowledge. Farrells is a welcoming and inclusive space to connect with other book lovers.

As well as selling books, we run an extensive program of events from author talks, multiple book clubs and children's activities including story times, kids' writing workshops and competitions. We bring a variety of cultural offerings to our community designed to enrich reading experiences, improve literacy levels, form friendships and combat loneliness, and provide opportunities for learning and personal growth. In short, we do not just 'sell books' and we consider our roles as booksellers as more akin to counsellors and matchmakers than retail shop assistants.

I currently employ 11 staff, each of whom shares my passion for books, reading and independent bookselling. We believe in being active participants in our community, supporting multiple not-for-profit groups including local schools, sports and other groups.

Local bookshops are not merely retail businesses. They are cultural infrastructure - community gathering places where Australian stories are discovered, where children fall in love with reading, and where literary careers begin. Yet every year bookshops close, undermined by online giants and discount chains that sell books at 40–50% below recommended retail price. A greater risk posed by the rise of international giants such as Amazon, who also act as publishing houses, is that over time the amount of Australian books being published will decrease, further and further diluting our opportunities to read and reflect on uniquely Australian stories. This would be a massive cultural loss, and one that the ongoing existence of independent Australian bookshops is vital to help mitigate.

Australia lags behind comparable countries in protecting its book retail sector. France, Italy, the UK, Germany, and more have introduced proven measures - discount caps, tax offsets, and rates relief - that have stabilised their independent bookshop sectors. Australia should do the same.

I support the Australian Booksellers Association's (ABA) call to:

- Fund establishment of a skills training and certification program to professionalise the industry, creating recognised career pathways.
- Establish an Australian Independent Bookshop Tax Offset (AIBTO): a refundable tax rebate on core operating expenses including wages, rent, and purchases of Australian-authored titles.
- Examine the feasibility of restrictions on deep discounting of new-release Australian titles, aligned with established European models.
- Investigate the case for GST reduction or exemption on books, consistent with international precedent.
- Invest in refreshing legacy data systems across the Australian book supply chain.
- Support an Australian Book Voucher Program, redeemable at local bookshops nationwide.
- Fund ongoing grants to support bookshop event delivery including author events, book clubs, workshops, story times, and other community programs.

I was ten years old when my parents followed their own crazy passion for children's books to risk everything and open a small independent specialist children's bookshop, which flourished before expanding to be a general bookshop. I watched my parents enrich so many people's lives – including my own – with their passion, as they ran successful businesses over thirty years. But the stresses and pressures of change in the industry over that time as unchecked globalisation has swept the world were significant. I am proud to have followed them into this calling in my own mid-life years and am grateful to be able to work in a career that I believe is intrinsically valuable and helps to make people's lives better and my community stronger. But recognition of our unique value and some degree of support via our inclusion in the National Cultural Policy would be invaluable.

I urge the government to act. Local bookshops are irreplaceable - but without support, more will close, and our Australian cultural heritage will be lesser for it. The measures proposed by the ABA are modest, internationally proven, and would deliver significant cultural and economic returns.

Yours sincerely,



Kate Horton

Owner
Farrells Bookshop