

National Cultural Policy Submission

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Public

Organisation

Currency Press

Short submission (text box 500 words or less)

I write on behalf of Currency Press, Australia's foremost performing arts publisher. We are a proud member of the APA, independently owned and a unique institution in Australia and a rare one in world publishing: a publishing house that subsists principally on the work of the local performing arts. Founded in 1971 by national theatre critic Katharine Brisbane and academic Philip Parsons, they were (and we still are) motivated by an understanding that publication would help to disseminate Australian plays to a wide, potentially international, audience, and in doing so, help to promote playwrights and theatre more generally. Without publication, it is easy for plays to disappear and their writers to be ignored. We remain committed to the same principle: to show Australia to itself, to record and to broadcast the voices and stories of our time.

We publish between 25 and 30 books a year, the majority of which are plays. We also publish cultural history and criticism and manuals. Each year, we're looking for a balanced list, with emerging and established authors, the commercial and less commercially viable (though culturally valuable), and covering all our markets. There is more than one way to measure the value of any given title, and we ensure the culturally significant titles make it onto the list.

For Currency Press, the last two years have been among our toughest in the last twenty years. Prices are going up (most notably for us printing, freight and rent) and our sales units have dropped. We have run at a loss for the last two years. When the margins decrease, we are forced to make more conservative decisions in terms of our publishing program, we are unable to invest in projects with significant costs (such as the implementation of our audiobook program) and we can't pay our staff the wages that they deserve. The low wages seem to be a problem across the industry and if it's not fixed, we're also going to lose the next generation of publishers to better-paid jobs.

When we publish only 'safe' books, it's not just our market that suffers. We published the first works of playwrights like Jack Davis, Patricia Cornelius, David Williamson. We risk losing the next wave of playwrights if this situation continues – only those with other sources of income will be able to afford to write.

We support an Australian Publishing Fund to support new Australian works, First Nations publishing, culturally significant (and financially risky) books. We need the true value of these works to be recognised and celebrated. We also ask for increased support for PLR and ELR. These secondary streams of income are essential for small publishers and their authors. We also call for a stricter enforcement of copyright law, especially in relation to data scraping.

These measures would help us publish more books, stay viable, and make meaningful contributions to the national discourse.