



National Cultural Policy Submission

22 May 2026

Dear Minister,

I write as a researcher at the Australian National University, leading the Australian Research Council-funded DECRA project *Audiobooks and Digital Book Culture*. This project investigates audiobook publishing and reading in Australia. It conducts industry interviews and a large reader survey, and partners with AustLit to construct a bibliographic record of Australian audiobooks.

I'm writing to draw your attention to the disproportionately small amount of Australian content in the Australian audiobook market. A third of Australians listen to audiobooks (34%), but as my research has shown, only a small fraction of those people (22.1%) are listening to Australian voices. Australia's audiobook listeners have international voices and international stories in their ears. The growing audiobook market is a serious missed opportunity for Australian representation.

The absence of Australian audiobooks isn't just because there's lots of overseas content in our book market overall: there are also specific barriers that disproportionately prevent Australian audiobooks from being made and from reaching readers. International platforms and licensing arrangements dominate what gets made and what gets circulated in Australia. We can see this in the fact that books by Gerald Murnane, for example—one of our most significant literary authors writing today—have been made into audiobooks by his American publishers, but these are not available in Australia, simply because it didn't seem financially worthwhile to the international distributor. We can also see this in the fact that systems like ACX, which enable self-published authors and self-starting narrators to collaborate on audiobooks for circulation through Audible, is not accessible to Australians, and there are no alternatives.

Further, when Australian audiobooks do get made, we treat them as second-tier: we can see this for example in their exclusion from the collections of the NLA and NFSA, which means many older Australian audiobooks are now lost to both readers and researchers.

Transformative and feasible measures that would intervene in these issues this could include audiobook-specific subsidisation similar to schemes implemented in Canada or New Zealand, development of technological infrastructure for self-published Australian authors and independent narrators to create and circulate audiobooks, or the inclusion of audiobooks under national legal deposit provisions and/or accepting audiobooks through the National e-deposit scheme.

Audiobooks make up a significant and growing proportion of how Australians access books, and for many Australians—such as those with vision impairments, print disabilities, dyslexia and more—they are a lifeline to book culture. Targeted interventions are needed to support the production of Australian audiobooks and to address the economic, geopolitical and technological barriers that currently prevent Australian voices from being heard.

Sincerely,

Dr Millicent Weber