

SUBMISSION Re: THE AUSTRALIAN NATIONAL CULTURAL POLICY 2026

22 May 2026

As an anthropologist and published author of both academic writing and fiction, and a life-long supporter of Australian cultural production, I wish to make a brief submission. There are so many elements which require comment but I will confine myself to the use of AI in creative endeavour. Clearly I support whatever can be done to ensure the proper use of Australian author's work not just in terms of "theft" and impact of generative AI and the need for multinational AI companies to have proper legal relations with Australian rightsholders. These are important issue but my concern is far deeper.

We are at a critical turning point in terms of the impact of new tech. The maintenance of a sustainable and distinctive Australian culture is deeply threatened. Already US cultural forms are overwhelming. This affects movies, TV, sports and visual arts but I am concerned here with the "written" (or "heard") word, and the inherent values which come to us through one form or another of writing and listening.

The current compulsory drenching in AI is my main concern. I am not an AI-denier or denunciator, but the deep-structural impact of AI on all kinds of "writing" must be more clearly understood and its consequences countered. Generative AI has been thrust upon us without consultation or agreement or even discussion. LLMs have scraped so much published work already and what now exists seems limitless. I know this from my own experience. Almost sixty of my published academic papers as well as two light-hearted short fictions were included in the original AI sweep, according to a recently published list. Because Australians are not eligible to register with the US Copyright Agency (not that anyone would have thought of it at the time) we were not eligible to participate in the US class-action suit which ultimately did result in some compensation to registered US authors. However, the "theft" issue is not my main concern here.

The paradigms and algorithms which CGPT, Claude and the other AI systems now apply to "writing" produce a bland uniformity often referred to as "slop". Personally I don't think that is the right term but let's leave that aside for the moment. Anyone who has had direct experience working with generative AI will know what I am talking about. It can have insidious consequences. People sending each other emails or messages (even text messages) no longer know who has written them. People who are only semi-literate can write as if they know what they are saying when in fact they are not saying what they mean because AI has written the message according to its algorithm based on what was originally written in a random amalgam of a million pieces of writing including fictions. The field of written interaction loses its "truth". Nobody knows who is saying what or if they mean it, or what they really mean.

"Formal" published writing is affected even more profoundly. Australian fiction, theatre, television, movies and all forms of creative writing are under threat. The paradigms and algorithms through which CGPT, Claude and all the other AI system "write" have produced a bland uniform "English" which, in fact, is American. Does that matter? Yes it does. Any Australian who has tried to work on fiction with a US editor will know the

surprising extent of “interference” which occurs in all kinds of subtle ways. When a US editor works on your manuscript (or when you run it through any kind of remote program even if it is not AI) you will find your mode of expression rejected or queried. It’s not just vocabulary (“sidewalk” instead of “footpath” – but if you think about it, a whole set of messages is conveyed by the word “sidewalk” instead of “footpath”), but phrases and expressions and constructions which convey different and important cultural values. With a human editor, one can argue back or ignore their advice. But with the emerging AI programs the author/writer can feed a few premises into the chosen AI and a text will emerge which is “perfect” as far as the algorithm is concerned. It is bland and uniform, clear and well-modulated. But it cancels the small differences which make the difference between one culture and another, one system of meaning and another, one set of unexpressed values and another.

What happens in writing is not just “telling a story”, it is creating a moral universe, a set of social and cultural expectations, a template for how people might think about their life and society. The material AI produces is closely attuned to certain understandings of the moral universe, through all kinds of subtle linguistic forms which can make a profound difference to the interior landscape of readers. The models produced are overwhelmingly saturated in cultural forms and values, including hyper-individualism, competitiveness, lack of concern for “others”, refusal of community, and many other subtleties. Most of us are unaware of how such elements are conveyed by apparently minimal schema of simile, metaphor, sentence construction, implied motivation, approaches in dialogue and deep structural organisation. But LLMs are created to reproduce precisely those forms which mirror or enhance a pre-existing condition of cultural performance and expectation. These are largely those found in the US mainstream, in some virtual realm where the “correct” approach to the world seems to have been agreed on and its expression in certain linguistic forms given dominance.

Accepting the use of LLMs may not be a problem in business or at the doctor’s office. But the deep psychological realities and structure of values which underly the reading (or viewing or hearing) of fiction and other literary forms is another issue. The world is modulated and recreated by the language through which it is comprehended.

Right now, elegant and sophisticated generative AI has been designed to produce fictions on demand, with more or less complete text. Anyone can purchase one of these programs and write popular books. While Amazon, for instance, requires authors to disclose to them whether or not the text of their book has been produced using generative AI, there is no requirement for public acknowledgment. Amazon is limiting authors to publishing no more than THREE BOOKS A DAY. Yes, that is right, three. Obviously this can only be achieved using AI but it is impossible to prove this is the case. None of the existing AI-detection programs have been found to be 100% reliable, even if Amazon wanted to find out for sure, which it obviously doesn’t.

Many respond that the answer is not to buy or read self-published books. But how many legacy publishers are able to tell whether the very few manuscripts they accept have been AI-produced, in whole or in part?

It is imperative to recognize the impact of these processes. In terms of national cultural policy, at the very least State-sponsored forms such as literary prizes, support for film-making and similar cultural productions should require explicit statements regarding the extent to which the development format, plot, characterization and dialogue has been created by AI. If it is AI created, the AI platform should be identified. The use of AI in editing should be acknowledged. Publishers in Australia generally should be required to explicitly state to what extent anything they publish has been written or in other ways created by the use of AI. Generative AI is also used for illustrations, covers and other visual materials in publishing. These should likewise be identified explicitly. While there are so many other ways in which a national cultural policy should support Australian creatives, the AI issue must be explicitly addressed and guidelines drawn up and agreed to

Other elements for the National Cultural Policy I particularly endorse include:

- The pilot of the projected basic income for writers
- Tax reform including tax-free literary prizes and grants and a tax-free threshold for writers and illustrators
- Research to provide baseline data on the book industry in Australia
- Co-ordination of a book-to-screen pipeline.

Thank you for the opportunity to comment.

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