

22 May 2026

Office for the Arts,
Canberra National Cultural Policy submission

I am grateful for the opportunity to make a submission to the National Cultural consultation. I am a publisher and editor, and also a reader, music lover, theatre-goer and cinephile, and it's been heartening to see the government recognise the importance of the arts, literature and creativity in Australian society, most recently in the establishment of Writing Australia.

I'm asking the Australian Government to prioritise making Australia a reading nation.

We are in the middle of a reading crisis. Recent research commissioned by Australia Reads shows that 1 in 3 students can't read proficiently, 30% of Australians didn't read or listen to a book last year, and 25% of Australian kids don't get a bedtime story.

We know of the social, economic and health benefits of reading. Reading improves job prospects, drives prosperity and innovation. It also inspires empathy and connection, it helps us understand ourselves and the world around us, and it relaxes us.

Australia Reads research showed that Australians *want* to read more but many lack skills and confidence. And some of us simply don't know how to access or discover books we'll enjoy. On top of that our attention has been stolen by devices with addictive algorithms primarily delivering overseas content.

We need investment in targeted national reading campaigns to increase reading participation for adults, children and young people. We need schools to be equipped to create a reading culture. We need support for all communities to access books and reading. We need to prioritise the showcasing of Australian stories and First Nations creators. And we need a thriving publishing industry.

The entire creative sector will thrive if the government prioritises the importance of making Australia a reading nation through providing well-resourced school libraries, through legislating for a dedicated and trained librarian in each school, through acknowledging the importance of Australian stories for Australian people, through protecting our territorial and intellectual copyright, through commissioning research and creating targeted reading campaigns to increase reading participation.

We need to solve this reading crisis for the future of our people, our culture and our industry. And if the Australian Government prioritises making Australia a reading nation following its Revive pillars, it will stimulate the creative sector, support Australian writers, illustrators and storytellers and help create a healthy and prosperous nation.

Sincerely
Anna McFarlane