

Office for the Arts
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I am a mid-career author of South Asian heritage with three published novels and a fourth due out in July this year.

The reality of making a living as a writer in Australia is that you are either forced to maintain separate employment while writing in the margins in your spare time, or (as in my case) you happen to have a partner/ family member willing to support you financially. Australian writers make on average \$18k per annum¹ through their creative practice which is well below the living wage². And yet this is the exact cohort of vulnerable creatives whose work has been the subject of large-scale copyright infringement by tech companies, commodifying their specific lived experience and years of creative discipline, without any consent or compensation. The publishing and arts sectors are under ever increasing economic pressure from cheap AI generated content; forcing out the very creatives who have built the industry that contributes over \$2 billion to the Australian economy³. Without appropriate AI regulation, fair pay structures that meaningfully values the time and knowledge of authors, and investment and tax reform that takes into account the specific challenges of the industry, local writers and illustrators are in danger of being squeezed out of the sector through burn out and insufficient opportunities for new and diverse creatives to enter the industry.

I am grateful for the initiatives introduced in *Revive* to assist with the sustainability of author and illustrator careers. However, since the introduction of *Revive*, authors have been facing increasingly precarious conditions. Without immediate support, we risk the viability of the book industry in Australia.

I am calling for:

- Direct investment in authors and illustrators via:
 - Multi-year fellowships supporting mid-career authors by providing them with time to write.
 - Seed money for emerging writers.
 - A top up to the Lending Rights budget.
 - A basic income pilot, involving 300 authors.
 - Investment in First Nations-led writing and publishing.

¹ <https://www.asauthors.org.au/news/australian-authors-books-included-in-ai-training-dataset>

² <https://ministers.dewr.gov.au/rishworth/national-minimum-wage-rise-35-cent-following-annual-wage-review>

³ <https://www.asauthors.org.au/news/asa-opposes-productivity-commission-proposal-for-copyright-exception/>

- Solutions to the unprecedented theft of Australian authors' work by multinational tech companies operating within Australia:
 - Transparency on copyright inputs for, and outputs from, generative AI models.
 - Research into the impact of generative AI on creative careers and Australian cultural output.
 - Structural solutions to bring multinational AI companies to the licensing table with Australian rightsholders.
- Tax reform to support author careers including tax-free literary prizes and grants, and a tax-free threshold for writers and illustrators.
- Adequate resourcing for Writing Australia to deliver:
 - Increased coordination between federal and state funding.
 - Commissioning of critically-needed research to provide baseline data from which to measure impact for the book industry.
 - Express guarantees included in every funding grant, ensuring that authors and illustrators engaged in funded projects will be paid at or above the Australian Society of Authors (ASA) recommended rate, and that generative AI will not be used to replace or diminish the role of human creators in government-funded projects.
 - Coordination of a book-to-screen pipeline.
- Commitment to educational interventions that support Australian authors and writing careers:
 - Nationwide authors-in-schools program funded out of education budgets.
 - Reversal of the failed Job-Ready Graduates program.

I am a member of the Australian Society of Authors (ASA) and support its submission.

Yours sincerely,

Dinuka McKenzie