



23 May 2026

The Hon Tony Burke MP
Minister for the Arts
Parliament House
Canberra ACT

Developing a Thriving Literary Culture in Australia

Dear Minister

On behalf of the Eleanor Dark Foundation, and Varuna the National Writers' House, we are writing to urge the Australian Government to prioritise and elevate the importance of literature in the new National Cultural Policy.

Of all artforms, literature has the singular capacity to take readers on a journey of the imagination. This is a journey that not only entertains, but also inspires empathy, sparks critical thinking, and deepens our understanding of what it means to be human. Put simply, literature is one of our greatest tools for building a wise and compassionate society.

Varuna the National Writers' House is one of Australia's most established and celebrated literary organisations. Since 1989, many thousands of writers have received a residency at Varuna, experiencing not only the gift of time and space to write, but also invaluable one-on-one mentorships and the company of fellow writers. Each year, Varuna also presents the Blue Mountains Writers' Festival, one of the largest regional literary festivals in the country.

In recent years, our staff and Board have witnessed the increasing — and unprecedented — technological, financial and structural barriers that Australian writers face. These barriers include decreased public funding, a small domestic market, declining rates of readership, algorithmic disadvantage on global platforms, reduced royalty income due to increased production and distribution costs, and the impact of AI. These barriers are even more profound for certain disadvantaged groups, such as writers experiencing financial hardship, or writers from First Nations or culturally diverse backgrounds.

In the absence of vision and new policy from the federal government, we risk limiting the opportunities for Australia's best writers to develop and publish new work. This in turn limits the readers who experience the benefits of literature, and how, as a multi-cultural and democratic country, we make sense of our culture, identity and purpose.

We implore the National Cultural Policy to elevate the position of literature in its priorities. Literature has long received the lowest proportion of funding of any of the major artforms, but over the last decade, both state and federal funding for literature has declined even further.

We recommend that, as a minimum, the Cultural Policy pledges the following:

- **Increased recognition of the importance of literature as an artform.** By necessity, this means increased federal funding for literature, as well as working more closely with state governments to achieve agreed priorities.
- **Increased investment in writers and their work.** Programs such as writing fellowships, writing residencies and skills development require direct investment in order for writers to develop new work.
- **An artist salary fund similar to that established in Iceland.** Established in 1990, this exemplary initiative offers monthly salaries to independent artists, including writers, for periods of between 3 and 12 months, a model that has demonstrably increased artistic output and career sustainability.
- **Tax reform to support author careers.** At a minimum, a clear priority is to modify legislation so that literary prizes and grants are tax free.
- **Support for the service organisations which provide vital services to writers.** Literary infrastructure such as writers' centres and writers' residencies provide essential skills development that is vital to a writer's career.
- **Adequate resourcing for Writing Australia.** This newly established initiative needs sufficient funding so that its aspirations can be realised. Larger sector-building initiatives, including export promotion and translation support, should receive dedicated funding streams.
- **Investment in First Nations-led writing, programming and publishing.** Increased funding for First Nations authors, publishers and literary organisations is essential.
- **Broadening of creative industry tax offsets.** Tax offsets, such as those offered to screen and gaming, should be made available to the publishing industry.
- **A dedicated National Plan for Books and Reading:** As per the proposal from Books Create Australia, the next National Cultural Policy should include a National Plan that covers writing, publishing, bookselling, libraries, reading and literary culture.

With vision and ambition, this Cultural Policy could do more than restore much-needed support to the literary sector — it could lay the foundations for a thriving Australian literary culture of international renown.

Yours sincerely,



Veechi Stuart, Executive Director



Maeve Marsden, Creative Director