

National Cultural Policy Submission

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Public

Individual

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Short submission (text box 500 words or less)

I am an Australian author, a first novel recently published, with writing also appearing in most major newspapers, online and in academic journals.

I write with two concerns: the theft of work written by Australian writers, often their lifework, stolen to feed and train AI, and the urgent need to develop a national cultural policy that recognises, recompenses and rewards the contribution writers make to arts, culture and community.

The theft of Intellectual Property poses a grave threat to Australian writers and illustrators who already earn so little income it is impossible to make even the merest living.

If we are to preserve and enhance Australia's literary culture, it is imperative that policy is developed to legislate copyright protections that prevent AI from mining the words and work of writers and illustrators.

Writers, for the most part, do not receive superannuation, sick leave or holiday pay, indeed almost all writers have paid work that supports their writing, income they often sink into their writing career.

There are even greater hurdles for writers, who, like me, come from working-class backgrounds, including financial restraints that limit educational opportunities and the many costs that writers fund along the way to becoming a writer.

There is too, the feeling of forever catching up, of not belonging, the imposter syndrome that many writers experience, writ all that larger for people of working class background, greater again for First Nations, migrants and refugees.

I published my debut novel in my late sixties, likely something I could not have achieved if not for the award of three fellowships. These fellowships not only supported me financially by way of accommodation and mentoring, they gave me a sense of self-belief.

If we are to have a flourishing literary culture we must encourage, invite and support diverse voices from all backgrounds, particularly those voices rarely heard and/or silenced.

It is said that part of the artist's role is to challenge what is comfortable and accessible, to stimulate ideas, to excite imagination, to confront orthodoxy. If Australia is to value diverse voices and ways of seeing, then we must also protect those voices from what is deemed politically palatable at the time, enshrining protections in policy so that all artists may make their work free of political censorship and interference.

Writers make an enormous contribution to culture, creativity, individual and collective wellbeing, they encourage empathy and critical thinking, they reflect on the past and present and future, they enrich our lives.

Investment in and support of writers and writing is long overdue.

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