



**Response to *Towards a new National Cultural Policy*
public consultation paper from the Office of the Arts**

May 2026

Meanjin literary journal is grateful for the opportunity to contribute to the Australian Government's next National Cultural Policy, building on the success of *Revive*. We frame our response through the latter two of the three prompt questions on page 8 of the consultation paper.

Why the five pillars matter to *Meanjin* and our practice

The story of *Meanjin*'s rehoming in Brisbane speaks directly to all five pillars of *Revive*.

Pillar 1 – First Nations First

Re-establishing *Meanjin* on the Country it was named for (Magandjin/Meanjin) reflects the importance of First Nations First that has been crucially championed by many in Australia's publishing sector, particularly its literary journals. This is urgent work to foreground and support, and *Meanjin* will continue to honour that priority in its next iteration.

Pillar 2 – A Place for Every Story

Meanjin's own origin story is the geographical archetype of this pillar: when Clem Christensen founded the journal in Magandjin (Brisbane) in 1940, he gave it the Yugara name *Meanjin* in order to relate 'culture ... to place'.

Literary journals are, in other ways, the very definition of the provision of a place for every story. They provide crucial sandboxes for writers' creative development and experimentation, as well as a trusted place for audiences to seek out and discover new voices. It is impossible to overstate the importance of this aspect in terms of underwriting the existence and sustainability of these outlets.

Pillar 3 – Centrality of the Artist

Consideration of this pillar reflects not only the impossibility of these outlets existing without the new work they house, but also journals' commitments to recognising and rewarding the creative labour that goes into each piece. Artists' fees are among the most significant cost for any literary journal, and one of *Meanjin*'s initial commitments is to benchmarking contributor payments for the next iteration of the journal to

published Australian Society of Authors (ASA) rates.¹ This commitment is the result of serious reflection – it will impact all plans for *Meanjin* budgets, fund-raising and sustainability, now and into the future – but it is our view that *Meanjin* must manifest the valorisation of literary and artistic labour that we ask of others, including donors and governments.

The funding slice for literature remains perilously low relative to other art forms, even with the welcome establishment of Writing Australia. Ongoing commitment to the centrality of the artist in this art form could consider not only increasing the amount of funding allocated to writers (in terms of the value, number and range of grants and fellowships on offer) but also the tax they are still required to pay on those grants, as well as on any awards.

Pillar 4 – Strong Cultural Infrastructure

Literary journals, like other artistic outlets, institutions and activities, constitute socially essential cultural infrastructure. Culture *does* connect people – the creative community, the ways it comes together and supports each other is living testament of that, through the different artistic sectors and across the country – and it does build connections within and resilience amongst its audiences.

Of greater concern, perhaps, is the resilience currently required by the vast majority of the artists themselves to keep producing that work. It is important to think of strong cultural infrastructure not only in terms of supporting artists but also in terms of the variety and reliability of outlets that audiences can access. While QUT’s intervention to revive and rehome *Meanjin* provided a welcome narrative of rescue and regeneration, some of our foremost and most critical cultural infrastructure remains under threat. This is one area where different metrics of value come most crucially into play – and where different possibilities for engagement need most urgently to be explored.

Pillar 5 – Engaging the Audience

If culture is to truly define who we are and how we are understood globally, there is more groundwork to do in terms of engaging audiences, both in Australia and overseas, and particularly for literature. Audiences are not only crowds of people physically gathered together – such as theatres, cinemas, concert halls, pub bandrooms, festivals and galleries – they are also individuals widely dispersed in space and participating asynchronously at the beach, in their living rooms, in libraries and on their commutes, through magazines, paperbacks, e-readers and audio books, as well as other distributed means.

Writing recently in *Griffith Review*, [REDACTED] noted that, in Norway, the ‘government purchases a thousand copies of every new title by a Norwegian writer, typically for distribution to public libraries. In Australia, which has five times Norway’s population, a writer is understood to have hit the big time if they sell a thousand

¹ <https://www.asauthors.org.au/rates-of-pay/>. The ASA in turn derives these rates from published Media, Entertainment and Arts Alliance (MEAA) rates: *Meanjin* will use whichever rate card is the most current.

copies.² Systems like this not only help in terms of the most blunt bottom-line metrics – print-run and sales – but through the flow-on effects of royalties (from those sales) and ongoing Public Lending Rights (through the libraries’ circulations).

What *Meanjin* would like to see reflected in the next National Cultural Policy

Meanjin supports the objectives and proposals of the Australia Reads submission,³ calling for the new National Cultural Policy to invest in a reading nation.

We endorse the call for a *Plan for Books and Reading* by Books Create Australia⁴ as a shared response to the National Cultural Policy from the Australian book industry; and the *Next Generation Now* report⁵ commissioned by Creative Australia in 2024, which presents a powerful argument for greater support for children and young people to engage in literature and the arts.

Meanjin also sees enormous benefit in affording greater recognition to vitally important forms of social and cultural value, additional to economic value, of local literary production and consumption. We draw the Government’s attention to the growing bank of rigorous and decisive evidence being conducted around the country to substantiate the value claim, such as the work of Australian scholars [REDACTED] (Melbourne), [REDACTED] (RMIT) and [REDACTED] (ANU).⁶

Dr John Byron, Publisher
Dr Ashley Hay, Establishing Editor

² Menzies-Pike, C. Pay writers like politicians: Rethinking Australia’s literary funding. *Griffith Review* 91, 34–41 (2026), (p.40). <https://www.griffithreview.com/articles/pay-writers-like-politicians>

³ <https://australiareads.org.au/news/national-cultural-policy-submission-2026/>

⁴ <https://bookscreate.com.au/>

⁵ <https://creative.gov.au/research/next-generation-now-benefits-arts-children-and-young-people>

⁶ Recent articles issuing from this authoritative scholarship include:

- van Loon, J., Coate, B. & Weber, M. Articulating Bookish Value: Value Beyond Price in the Words of Australian Literary Arts and Publishing Sector Insiders. *Pub Res Q* 41, 261–283 (2025). <https://doi.org/10.1007/s12109-025-10044-6>
- van Loon, J., Coate, B. & Weber, M. How to value a book: Measuring the impact of the locally produced book. *Australian Book Review*, no. 481 (November 2025). <https://www.australianbookreview.com.au/abr-online/archive/2025/november-2025-no-481/how-to-value-a-book-measuring-the-impact-of-the-locally-produced-book-by-julienne-van-loon-bronwyn-coate-and-millicent-weber>
- van Loon, J., Coate, B. & Weber, M. What is the value of *Meanjin*? We’ve done some calculations – and it’s not about money. *The Conversation* (23 September 2025). <https://theconversation.com/what-is-the-value-of-meanjin-weve-done-some-calculations-and-its-not-about-money-265476>