

Minister Burke
Minister for the Arts
c/o Australia's National Cultural Policy
Submission portal

Anne Donaldson


23 May 2026

Dear Minister Burke,

Australia's National Cultural Policy

I am writing as an author in support of two compelling causes for the cultural, societal and economic health of Australia – school libraries and local bookshops.

My debut picture book, 'Derek', with acclaimed illustrator Matt Shanks and published by Hardie Grant Children's Publishing, is currently shortlisted for the 2026 Children's Book Council of Australia awards. As an Australian creator, I understand the value of the channels through which our own stories can be disseminated and accessed, without which we would not have an 'Australian culture'.

My love and grasp of literature can be firmly attributed to having had ready access to and unlimited book borrowing from libraries during my formative years, supplemented by treasured purchases and gifts from local bookshops. Therefore, it was natural when I had children of my own that books would form a significant part of how I navigate parenthood.

Beyond the valuable hours of bonding, language learning and pure entertainment my children and I have derived from books themselves, we have also benefitted from story times, craft activities, social groups and sometimes just safe and welcoming spaces that both libraries and bookshops provide.

I believe these opportunities should not be privileges, but commonly accessible to all. Particularly given the proven value of literacy and early reading for development, and of 'third spaces' for social cohesion. School libraries and local bookshops are vital tools for the good of Australia, and they deserve targeted support.

School libraries

As stated by the Australian Library and Information Association:

"School libraries play a particularly important role in supporting children to develop a life-long relationship with reading. A well-managed library collection is diverse and enticing. Teacher librarians provide whole-school leadership in literacy programs that foster reading culture. School libraries coordinate author talks and creative programs that engage children directly with artists."

Every child in Australia deserves a school library, staffed by a qualified librarian. This is not an optional luxury, but a necessary component of effective education.

Further, with declining literacy levels requiring urgent attention, with positive cultural spaces and stories required to counter increasingly divisive rhetoric (across genders, ethnicities, religions and politics), and with efforts such as banning children from social

media spotlighting the need for alternative channels for children to engage in constructive cultural consumption, the need for school libraries and qualified school librarians has never been more compelling than now.

I request a commitment from this Government that every Australian school child, primary and secondary, will have access to a school library with a qualified librarian.

Local bookshops

Local bookshops in Australia are more than just product retailers, they are cultural spaces. They develop local communities and nurture local talents in a manner analogous to an R&D institution developing new technologies.

I have personally benefitted as a parent, community member and author from local bookshops hosting events, creating welcoming magical spaces, and hand-selling our Australian stories.

As an entirely unknown, first-time author, a local bookshop kindly hosted a beautiful launch for my picture book. This sent children home excitedly clutching their signed copy, with a special understanding that creators are real people. I received follow up pictures from parents sharing that their kids had been inspired to go home and engage in their own creative endeavours. Which is how culture is built!

The cultural value that local bookshops and their committed staff achieve cannot be replicated or replaced by any other model. These bookshops are not interchangeable with discount chains, where there is little diversity of stock, no informed and expert meeting of customer needs, and no human engagement – which is the heart of culture.

I request that this Government recognise the cultural contribution of local bookshops, and support them in accordance with the measures outlined by the Australian Booksellers Association, as follows.

- Fund a skills training and certification program.
- Establish an Australian Independent Bookshop Tax Offset (AIBTO) refundable tax rebate on core operating expenses (wages, rent, and purchasing Australian titles).
- Examine the feasibility of restrictions on deep discounting of new-release Australian titles, aligned with established European models.
- Investigate GST reduction or exemption on books.
- Invest in refreshing legacy data systems across the Australian book supply chain.
- Support an Australian Book Voucher Program, redeemable at local bookshops.
- Fund ongoing grants to support bookshop event delivery including author events, book clubs, workshops, story times, and other community programs.

These measures for school libraries and librarians, local bookshops and their staff represent modest investments in proven initiatives which will directly strengthen literacy, community and economic wellbeing. They are both relevant and forward looking. They will have immediate, tangible benefits as well as building better educated, engaged, inspired, informed, creative, connected, resilient, represented, productive, passionate communities, with a strong Australian culture.

Yours sincerely,

Anne Donaldson