



24 May 2026

Office for the Arts

Department of Infrastructure, Transport,

Regional Development, Communications and the Arts

GPO Box 594 | CANBERRA ACT 2601



Towards a new National Cultural Policy: a response to the call for public consultation

I write in my capacity as an Australian author and as an academic expert in the discipline of Creative Writing. My current role is Associate Professor of Creative Writing at the University of Melbourne. I am the author of three novels, including an Australian/Vogel's Award Winner, a critically-praised essay collection, and numerous shorter works, as well as more than twenty academic articles relevant to books and writing, creative arts pedagogy and creative practice research. Over the course of my career, I have received funding support from Creative Australia, Copyright Agency, ArtsWA and Creative Victoria. I am an Honorary Fellow in Writing at the University of Iowa, and the managing editor at scholarly creative writing journal TEXT.

One of my key research interests is in the public value of the local book. Research in this area has made it very clear that books and writing in Australia are systemically undervalued (see references, below). An over-reliance on quantitative methods, especially dollar value, as the primary approach to understanding value in the arts has led to an entrenched failure to value local books and writing in the fullest sense. If we are genuinely to “place the arts at the centre of modern life” (as *Revive* has aspired to do), we need a new National Cultural Policy that is attentive to and enabling of Australian books and writing in the following value terms:

- skills, jobs and economic prosperity, including the role played by Australian books and writing in learning, development and education; building creative workforce skills; contributing to other industries; fostering more prosperous communities; and driving economic growth
- social cohesion and building equity, including how distinctly local content in Australian books and writing builds social cohesion; strengthens civic infrastructure; combats hate; helps to shape and communicate our collective identity; and enables us to realize our full potential.
- wellbeing, including how a thriving books and writing sector in Australia benefits our mental health and wellbeing; helps us feel connected to others; assists us to make sense of where we are at as a people; contributes to First Nations health and wellbeing; and provides a sense of refuge or escape, joy, purpose or accomplishment.

I am grateful for the initiatives introduced in *Revive* to assist with the sustainability of writers and illustrators and for the introduction of Writing Australia as a new national body to support the literary arts in Australia. However, since the



introduction of *Revive*, Australian authors, publishers and creative arts educators and students have been facing increasingly precarious conditions. Without immediate support, we risk:

- the viability of creative writing as a career for any Australian;
- the viability of a local book industry that nurtures, publishes and promotes Australian content;
- the opportunity for the Australian public to read, hear, see and experience vibrant, high-quality stories of their own times, places and people reflected in the books, films, music and theatre productions that are available to them.

I commend and support the submissions from:

- Australian Society of Authors (as a member and a former Director and Chair)
- AustLit (as a member of the Advisory Board)
- Australasian Association of Writing Programs (as a member)
- Books Create Australia
- Australia Reads
- Australian Publishers Association

I would like to see a new National Cultural Policy that prioritises and delivers on the following recommendations:

Pillar 1: First Nations first

- Fund all school libraries to access AustLit and BlackWords.
- Pay First Nations peer reviewers, board members and advisors adequately for the work they do.
- Provide targeted fellowship funding to support the long-term livelihoods of talented First Nations writers and illustrators (e.g. five-year fellowships).

Pillar 2: A place for every story

- Support hyper-local creative writing initiatives in a community development context for health, wellbeing, creative placemaking and social cohesion: creative writing does not necessarily require commercialisation or large-scale readership in order to be meaningful to local communities.
- Better support Australian teachers to incorporate the active, creative dimension of creative writing and storytelling into English literature, literacy and language teaching. Reading is only one half of the literacy coin; creative writing must be the other.
- Fund targeted schemes to increase the international visibility of Australian writing, generating new revenue for authors and publishers, and strengthening Australia's international presence.

Pillar 3: Centrality of the artist

- Create and support transparent artform-specific expenditure reporting that monitors, and perhaps guarantees, minimum dollar figure or percentage of overall national arts spend allocations to each established artform category to help to ensure that Australian writing, writers and publisher are no longer entrenched as the poor cousins of other artforms and/or creative industries in national arts funding expenditure terms.
- Maintain support for educational, public and digital lending rights to a degree that keeps up with inflation.



- Hold nationally funded organisations and/or publishers to minimum author payment terms and/or minimum fair contract terms (as set out by the ASA and/or MEAA) to ensure authors always receive appropriate payment for their work.
- Re-establish a national unpublished manuscript award for writers under 35 years of age. The Australian/Vogels award is missed by aspiring young writers and their voices remain important to Australian readers of all ages and deserve to be heard.

Pillar 4: Strong cultural infrastructure

- Ensure high-quality, free and accessible creative arts education is a priority at every level of education.
- Work with other arms of government to ensure that Australia's world-class creative arts tertiary education infrastructure is not vulnerable to sudden closure or radical defunding at the whim of a rogue university Vice Chancellor.
- Work with other arms of government and with not-for-profit arts boards to ensure that Australia's leading cultural treasures (e.g. long-running literary journals, selected small publishers that deserve national cultural heritage status) are not vulnerable to sudden closure or radical defunding due to a single funding round failure or the withdrawal of a single benefactor
- Train not-for-profit arts board members to make informed, considered decisions and follow agreed protocols that protect both an artist or writer's freedom of speech and their own organisation's capacity to endure in an era of social-media panic and cancellation culture.
- Invest in high-quality cultural data and metadata for Australian books and writing in order to understand better understand, support and leverage its public value.
- Create and support stronger links between the Australian Research Council and Creative Australia on research relevant to the creative arts and creative industries.

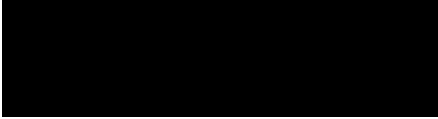
Pillar 5: Engaging audiences

- Invest in robust data systems and sustainable digital infrastructure to increase discoverability, searchability and visibility of the full range of Australian literature.
- Assist Australian publishers and small presses to overcome exorbitant national distribution costs and related challenges
- Set a recommended minimum percentage of Australian content for all schools and universities teaching English literature, literary studies and/or creative writing and for influential publicly funded media organisations.
- Ensure writers festivals and other key arts organisations engaging with Australian literature/Australian writing, and that are receiving national arts funding, provide an agreed minimum percentage of events in their programming that are free to all, thereby limiting economic barriers to participation.

Please hear the voices of Australian writers, readers of Australian literature and the organisations that assist and support Australian books and writing right across this suite of these policy submissions. We are struggling to maintain a sector of the arts, and an allied industry, that matters deeply and that has so much yet to offer and to give in public value terms, for the benefit of all Australians. A new national cultural policy must genuinely support and enable Australian books and writing: now is the time for a radical 360 degree re-appraisal and a generous & robust re-investment strategy.



Yours sincerely,



Julienne van Loon

Associate Professor in Creative Writing
School of Culture and Communication
University of Melbourne VIC 3010

References

Coate, Bronwyn, Julien van Loon and Millicent Weber. "Articulating the 'Value' of Cultural Products: The Case of Australian Books." *Realizing the Value of Culture: The Value-Based Approach*. Ed. By Lyudmila Petrova, Arjo Klammer, Christian Handke, Valeria Morea and Yonsun Won. Routledge, 2026. In Press.

van Loon, Julien, Bronwyn Coate and Millicent Weber. "Articulating Bookish Value: Value Beyond Price in the Words of Australian Literary Arts & Publishing Sector Insiders." *Publishing Research Quarterly*, vol 41, issue 3, 2025, pp.261-283, <https://doi.org/10.1007/s12109-025-10044-6>.

van Loon, Julien, Bronwyn Coate and Millicent Weber. "What is the value of Meanjin? We've done some calculations – and its not about money." *The Conversation*. 23 Sept 2025. <https://theconversation.com/what-is-the-value-of-meanjin-weve-done-some-calculations-and-its-not-about-money-265476>

van Loon, Julien. 'Six capitals and a local book: an experiment with articulating the value of Bruce Pascoe's *Dark Emu*.' *Journal of Australian Studies*, vol 47, no.1, 2023, pp.181-199, doi.org/10.1080/14443058.2022.2147573.

van Loon, Julien. 'On value and Australian books and writing.' *Sydney Review of Books*. 1 Apr. 2021, np., <https://sydneyreviewofbooks.com/essays/on-value-and-australian-books-and-writing>.