



23 May, 2026

Submission to the National Cultural Policy:
The Role of Local Bookshops in Australia's Cultural, Social and Economic Life

Dear Minister Burke,

Thank you for the opportunity to make a submission to the National Cultural Policy.

I am writing as a bookseller to urge the government to include meaningful support for local bookshops in the new National Cultural Policy.

My bookshops include Avid Reader Bookshop, Where the Wild Things Are and Riverbend Books located in Brisbane. These bookshops have operated for 29, 11 and 28 years respectively.

Firstly, I support a number of the Australian Booksellers Association's (ABA) submission to:

1. Fund the establishment of a skills training and certification program development and delivery to professionalise the industry, creating recognised career pathways.
2. Establish an Australian Independent Bookshop Tax Offset (AIBTO): a refundable tax rebate on core operating expenses including wages, rent, and purchases of Australian-authored titles.
3. Invest in refreshing legacy data systems across the Australian book supply chain.
4. Support an Australian Book Voucher Program, redeemable at local bookshops nationwide.
5. Fund ongoing grants to support bookshop event delivery including author events, book clubs, workshops, author discovery, school author tours, story times, and other community programs.

Further, I wish to make the following points.

Local bookshops are vital cultural infrastructure. We advance national literacy, strengthen community life, champion Australian stories and contribute meaningfully to Australia's creative and knowledge economies.

Local bookshops play five critical roles, we:

1. Drive literacy and reading engagement: through curated collections, personalised recommendations, school partnerships, book fairs, author school visits, book clubs and author events. Bookshops foster a lifelong passion for reading and support national literacy outcomes.
2. Provide community gathering spaces: bookshops act as inclusive, intergenerational third spaces that host cultural events, reduce social isolation and strengthen local communities.
3. Sustain Australian stories and publishing: Independent bookshops champion Australian authors and illustrators, and publishers, ensuring local voices remain visible in an increasingly globalised market.
4. Create knowledge-economy jobs: bookshops employ skilled cultural workers, support adjacent creative industries and stimulate local economic activity.

Despite our cultural importance, independent bookshops face significant structural pressures — from declining reading rates to the dominance of global retail giants — that threaten our long-term viability.

Australia faces a long-term decline in reading for pleasure, particularly among young people. This trend threatens literacy outcomes, cultural participation and the viability of book-related industries.

Global online retailers and discount department stores capture around half of all book sales, reducing community engagement and undermining Australian cultural visibility.

24% of independent bookshop owners take no wages or dividend, reflecting the financial fragility of the sector.

Targeted policy support is required to ensure bookshops can continue to serve as vital community and cultural hubs. To address these challenges, we support the ABA's policy pillars requiring coordinated Federal, State and Local government action:

Community & Cultural Engagement – Recognise and support bookshops as cultural hubs through event funding, cultural grants and accessible local programs.

Sustainability of Local Bookshops – Support viability through small-business programs, rates relief and procurement policies favouring local bookshops.

Supply Chain & Digital Innovation – Strengthen competitiveness through supply-chain investment, limits on deep discounting of new Australian titles and digital capability grants.

Long-Term Growth & Resilience – Build workforce capacity through training subsidies and national bookseller certification.

I draw the Committee's attention to a recent report *Booksellers as Placemakers*, commissioned by the British Booksellers Association and produced by the Institute of Place Management at Manchester Metropolitan University.

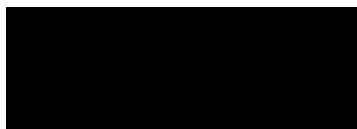
In summary, the report shows that independent bookshops are critical place-based cultural infrastructure that deliver significant public value. It demonstrates that bookshops strengthen local identity, foster social cohesion, support cultural participation and contribute to high-street resilience by attracting foot traffic and supporting surrounding small businesses. Through events, community programs and the curation of local stories, bookshops act as trusted cultural anchors that enhance wellbeing and civic engagement. The report concludes that bookshops generate social, cultural and economic benefits far beyond their retail function and should be formally recognised and supported within government cultural policy, economic development strategies and place-based planning frameworks.

In conclusion, a coordinated policy response across Federal, State and Local governments is essential to ensure that bookshops can continue to serve as cultural anchors in Australian life.

Supporting bookshops is not simply supporting retail – it is investing in Australia's cultural identity, literacy future and creative economy.

I wish the committee members the best in their endeavours developing a new National Cultural Policy and I am willing to speak to this submission.

Yours sincerely



Fiona Stager (OAM)

Co-owner of Avid Reader Bookshop, Where the Wild Things Are and Riverbend Books
Life Member of the Australian Booksellers Association