I, Hajnalka Molloy (Teacher Librarian) call on the National Cultural Policy 2026 to include a clear commitment that every Australian student will have access to a well-resourced school library, staffed by fully qualified professionals. It is a fundamental pillar in building a strong, equitable national culture that supports the creative industry and engages and connects young people with First Nations Stories and Culture, diverse voices, and directly employs authors and illustrators through visits and residency programs in schools.

With a strong investment, school libraries and their staff they can directly address each of the pillars of the National Culture Policy, however most schools no longer have adequate and suitably qualified staff to support this. Alarmingly some schools no longer have a school library. In South Australia less than 15% of all schools have a dual qualified teacher librarian.

First Nations First: First Nations stories at the centre of Australia's arts and culture.

- Provide schools with a grant to purchase from selected list of Indigenous Publishers
- Provide grant for approved Indigenous author/artist visits
- Provide training to school library staff to decolonise school libraries, and ensure effective access to Indigenous stories and resources through culturally sensitive and responsive resource descriptions.

A Place for Every Story: Reflecting the breadth of our stories and the contribution of all Australians as the creators of culture.

- Supporting our students to become creatives by providing grants for Authors/illustrators in residence programs, giving students direct opportunities to learn from creatives, whilst also providing employment for Australian creatives.

Centrality of the Artist: Supporting the artist as worker and celebrating artists as creators.

- Provide grants for Australian school libraries to be able to access Australian Authors/illustrators for school visits. This has strong proven impact on students and their development as creatives and engaging them in reading.

Strong Cultural Infrastructure: Providing support across the spectrum of institutions which sustain our arts, culture and heritage.

School libraries are an existing infrastructure within most schools that has been significantly neglected over many years. An investment in school libraries and their staff would support long-term sustainability and support Australian creatives through the purchasing of their books and cultural creations. Support students to become readers, and engage students with Australian art and literature.

- National funding for school to have and maintain a school library
- National funding for a teacher librarian in every school
- Funding for scholarships for librarians to be trained as teachers or teachers to be trained as librarians to ensure every student has access to a dual qualified teacher librarian

Engaging the Audience: Making sure our stories connect with people

With literacy crucial to Australia's future and reading proficiency declining nationwide, school libraries are vital to a long-term reading strategy. They provide access to diverse collections that remove barriers to reading and expand cultural access for students.

Teacher librarians understand students' interests and learning needs, helping connect each child with the right book at the right time. For many young people, school libraries are the first or only connection to stories and Australian culture.