

National Cultural Policy Submission

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Individual

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Short submission (text box 500 words or less)

Australia's new National Cultural Policy presents an important opportunity to recognise the role independent bookshops play in shaping the country's cultural, intellectual, and community life. As someone who has worked in journalism and communications across different countries, I believe independent bookstores are far more than retail spaces. They are cultural meeting points where stories, conversations, and diverse perspectives are made accessible to communities every day.

One of the most encouraging aspects of the policy discussion is the growing recognition that culture is not confined to major institutions or metropolitan arts centres. Independent bookshops support local authors, host conversations, encourage reading among young people, and create spaces where communities can engage with ideas beyond algorithms and commercial trends.

I strongly support proposals such as tax offsets for bookshops and book vouchers for children starting Prep. Encouraging reading from an early age is an investment in literacy, imagination, and social connection. At the same time, supporting independent bookstores helps preserve physical cultural spaces that are increasingly under pressure from online retail and changing consumption habits.

Importantly, independent bookstores also play a vital role in reflecting the diversity of contemporary Australia. Migrant and diasporic communities contribute enormously to the country's cultural fabric, yet many stories still remain underrepresented or filtered through narrow stereotypes. Literature has the power to bridge communities and create empathy, particularly at a time when societies worldwide are becoming increasingly polarised. Bookshops that actively support diverse writers and perspectives help foster understanding and strengthen social cohesion.

Another important aspect of the National Cultural Policy is the future of local journalism and independent storytelling. In an era dominated by algorithms, shrinking newsrooms, and imported content, protecting Australian stories becomes crucial. Cultural policy should not focus solely on large institutions, but also on grassroots creators, community media, regional voices, emerging artists, and independent cultural spaces that often operate without visibility or long-term security.

Independent bookstores are closely connected to this broader ecosystem of storytelling. They frequently champion small publishers, debut authors, local journalists, and community voices that larger commercial systems may overlook. In doing so, they help sustain a richer and more representative cultural conversation.

I also appreciate the policy's recognition that culture has both social and economic value. Creative industries contribute significantly to education, wellbeing, tourism, and national identity. However, their long-term strength depends on ensuring access, diversity, and meaningful support at the community level.

Overall, I view the new National Cultural Policy as a promising and necessary step. Supporting independent bookstores should form a meaningful part of that vision, not only because they support Australian literature and local economies, but because they help create informed, connected, and culturally inclusive communities across the country.