

Office for the Arts
 Department of Infrastructure, Transport,
 Regional Development, Communications and the Arts
 GPO Box 594 | CANBERRA ACT 2601

24 May 2026

Dear Minister Burke,

As an Australian writer of almost 30 years' standing, I'm grateful for the opportunity to submit to this consultation. I'm the author of eight novels and three books of non-fiction. My most recently published novel *Stone Yard Devotional* was shortlisted for the 2024 Booker Prize and named a top 10 book of 2025 by both the *New York Times* and the *Washington Post*. My newly completed novel, *Say Something Nice to Me*, will be published in 2027. I was awarded an Order of Australia (AM) for significant services to literature in 2019, and I have three degrees in creative writing, including a PhD.

I am a member of the Australian Society of Authors and fully support their submission and recommendations.

While I now have a successful career internationally and in Australia, I was unable to support myself with my writing until 16 years into my career, after the publication of my seventh book. Since I began publishing, the book industry has become much more difficult for new writers; I make this submission mostly on behalf of those who have not had my good fortune.

The greatest threat to my work as a writer now is the theft of my books by tech companies to train AI – all of my books have been stolen, both in the English language editions and some translations. In all, 16 editions of my books have been illegally used to train AI. I urge you most strongly to protect Australian writers' copyright and our entire book industry from the totally unconscionable behaviour of global tech companies, and to continue to reject the appalling recent Productivity Commission recommendation to allow those amoral companies – who care nothing for Australian culture or our economy – to strip-mine our creativity and our intellectual property.

Writers are the crucial primary producers of Australian culture – our books are adapted for screen and film and stage and opera; we write fiction *and* screenplays, stage plays *and* short stories, poetry, songs, novels *and* journalism. Without writers there is no publishing industry, no bookselling industry, there are no literary agents, no book reviewers or printers, no book and mixed arts festivals drawing tourism to regional areas out of season. Without writers there is no film industry, no theatre or television production. With our imaginations and our intellects we create jobs of many different kinds in all these industries. Primary producers in agriculture and mining are offered subsidies, incentives and business development opportunities, but none of that is available to us; instead we are offered the smallest possible proportion of federal arts funding.

Public investment in funding for writers is exceptional value for money – apart from keeping real poverty (just) at bay for writers, it benefits the wider community as books and literature are proven to promote social wellbeing and mental health, improve literacy and numeracy and have a powerful community-building function across our nation. Bookshops, literary festivals and libraries create positive ways to rebuild communities affected by bushfires, drought and other hardships. All funding to individual writers filters directly into local communities.

Australian literature is central to how we see ourselves and how we want the world to see us. We define ourselves through our favourite books' evocations of landscape, history and character. The international success of our writers – the likes of Tom Kenneally, Tim Winton, Hannah Kent, Pip Williams, Richard Flanagan, Alexis Wright, Charlotte McConaghy, Liane Moriarty, Jane Harper, Kate Grenville, Helen Garner, Michael Robotham, Mem Fox – inspires us and builds national pride.

I write this letter on the closing day of the 2026 Sydney Writers' Festival, to which audiences have flocked in higher numbers than ever before in its 29-year history. The community is proving its love of and need for writers over and over again, but writers are living in poverty and under extreme stress. We need your support.

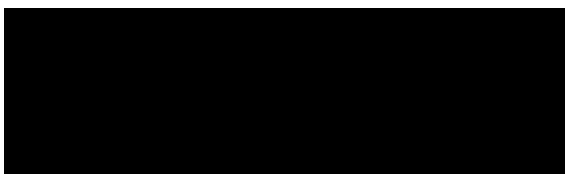
I wholeheartedly support the ASA call for:

- **Direct investment in authors and illustrators**
- **Investment in First Nations-led writing and publishing.**
- **Solutions to the unprecedented theft of authors' work by multinational tech companies**
- **Tax reform to support author careers**
- **Adequate resourcing for Writing Australia**
- **Commitment to educational interventions that support Australian authors and writing careers.**

In addition, I urge the **subsidising of book-related spending for young people** in the form of vouchers for books at independent booksellers, writers' festivals and other literary events. I urge a hugely **increased investment in encouragement of reading from birth** via support for libraries, school literacy and literature programs and libraries. And I **urge our leaders to stand by and vocally promote the fundamental right to freedom of expression** that is the basis of all civilised societies. Calls to ban, deplatform or censor writers are the hallmark of totalitarian regimes – not our egalitarian, free-thinking and modern Australia.

I make one final plea to our political leaders: **please read literature yourself**. Read books, show the community your love of books in the same way you show your love of sport and music. Start book clubs in Parliament – writers will happily join you for great discussions! We cannot encourage a richly educated and innovative, imaginative society if our own leaders constantly display their personal apathy for literature and reading, the foundations for the imagination and critical thought that will see us through the AI revolution. If you read, please share your love of books and talk about your reading life prominently, in public. If you don't read literature, please begin. It will make your life richer, smarter, deeper, more fun, more beautiful and more meaningful. I promise.

With sincere best wishes,



Dr Charlotte Wood, AM
Australian author