

NATIONAL CULTURAL POLICY 2026

SUBMISSION

My contribution to the National Cultural Policy public consultation is as an author and bookseller with a particular interest in events and programming. Over my career I have worked in small publishing houses, independent and chain bookshops, and as an interviewer for libraries, writers festivals and other organisations. I have worked at the same independent bookshop for seven years, where I am now the Store Manager, and have a firm understanding of the challenges my industry faces.

As a representative of bookshops, I urge the government to address:

- **Aggressive rental increases on commercial leases.** Government subsidies, tax concessions and/or legislative safeguards would go a long way to protecting bricks-and-mortar bookshops from being priced out of our suburbs. Such moves would acknowledge that most bookshops survive on slim margins, focussing their efforts on bringing intangible value to their communities through events, workshops, story time for children, book clubs, and other initiatives. Independent bookshops exist in the uncomfortable overlap between retail, art, for-profit, and not-for-profit.
- **Predatory pricing by discount department stores.** Department stores such as Big W, Kmart and Target routinely sell books below cost price as part of a predatory loss-leading strategy that directly impacts the viability of independent bookshops who cannot afford to price match these outlets. Often, such retail giants are selling books *below* price that bookshops can *buy them for*, wholesale. We require government intervention, as successfully modelled in other countries, to regulate this practice and level the playing field. As outlined in the submission by the Australian Booksellers Association, the industry is declining by 3.5 - 5% each year, and in the last twelve months alone we have lost at least 13 bookshops. At the time of writing my submission, I can add another 2 bookshops to that list: Boffins Books in Perth (WA), and Antipodes Bookshop in Sorrento (VIC). The continued loss of bookshops will result in a further decline in reading and the devaluing of literature in Australia.
- **The lack of investment and funding for bookshops.** Bookshops operate as essential cultural infrastructure, much like libraries, galleries and museums, but do not receive the same recognition nor investment. Capacity-building grants aimed at

growing the role that independent bookshops play within local cultural ecosystems are essential to the future of bookshops in Australia. In addition, investment in bookshops as 'venues' (much like independent cinemas and music venues) would strengthen the sustainability of the sector. Rate relief and rental subsidies should also form part of the bigger picture.

As the Manager of an independent bookshop privy to the operating costs of our business, I would like to reiterate the following policy recommendations made by the Australian Booksellers Association:

- 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, modelled on the Australian Screen Production Incentive.
- Fund ongoing **grants to support bookshop event delivery** including author events, book clubs, workshops, story times, and other community programs. Grant funding in this space benefits audiences and rolls down through the literature ecosystem, benefitting authors as well as audiences.

From the perspective of an author, I wish to add the following points and suggestions to this submission:

- **Prize money from literature awards should be tax exempt**: the current system that counts prize money towards a writer/creative's annual salary fundamentally misunderstands how art is made. For example, an author who wins \$20,000 for a book they spent five years researching and writing is currently taxed as if that book was written, published and awarded a prize all within the same financial year. Artists are already earning, in many cases, below or on the poverty line in Australia, so to have prize money taxed as if it constitutes regular earnings is deeply unfair.
- **The threat of Artificial Intelligence urgently needs to be addressed**: Large Language Models have already brazenly stolen the work of authors in order to mimic their work. Now, AI-authored works threaten to usurp the place of human-authored stories in our local markets. Action urgently needs to be taken to protect artists from the coming wave of AI-slop that will soon flood our cultural spaces.