

*Submission to the National Cultural Policy consultation*

# Backing the Pipeline of Australian Books, Ideas and Knowledge

## 1. Introduction

The Australian Publishers Association welcomes the opportunity to contribute to the development of Australia's next National Cultural Policy. The APA's central recommendation is that the Australian Government establish a dedicated **National Plan for Books and Reading** that recognises books and publishing as core cultural and knowledge infrastructure, addresses the growing pressures on written culture, and supports the full pipeline through which Australian stories, ideas and knowledge are created, published, protected, discovered, accessed and read. The APA recommends that the Australian Government:

### **Pillar 1: First Nations First**

1. **Respect First Nations cultural authority in publishing**, including through support for First Nations-led publishing, ICIP protocols, First Nations data sovereignty, and culturally safe publishing practice.

### **Pillar 2: A Place for Every Story**

2. **Establish an Australian Book Fund for Australian-owned publishers** to support the creation, production, promotion and distribution of new Australian works across print, digital, audio, accessible and export-ready formats.
3. **Extend creative-industry offsets, rebates or equivalent incentives to Australian publishing** to support the commercial-scale publication of Australian works and recognise publishing as a creative industry with significant development risk.

### **Pillar 3: Centrality of the Artist**

4. **Protect copyright and ensure rights-respecting AI**, based on consent, direct and voluntary licensing, fair payment, transparency, provenance and practical enforcement.
5. **Maintain and strengthen Lending Rights as core cultural infrastructure**, ensuring fair remuneration for authors, illustrators and publishers when their works are made available through public and educational libraries.

## Pillar 4: Strong Cultural Infrastructure

6. **Strengthen Writing Australia as the national literature agency**, while funding major book-sector infrastructure measures separately so Writing Australia is not overloaded.
7. **Build national book data, metadata, rights and supply-chain infrastructure** to improve discoverability, accessibility, licensing, export, supply-chain efficiency and policy evidence.
8. **Establish Books Australia** to promote Australian books at home and overseas, including domestic discovery, rights sales, translation, export promotion, market development and cultural diplomacy.
9. **Fund born-accessible publishing and inclusive discoverability** through government-supported workflows, formats, metadata, training, platform coordination and specialist alternative-format production.
10. **Recognise educational publishing as creative and knowledge infrastructure**, including its role in literacy, curriculum, teacher support, Australian content, accessibility, statutory licensing and local intellectual property.
11. **Engage with scholarly and research publishing as trusted knowledge infrastructure**, including in relation to research integrity, peer review, AI-generated low-quality content, metadata, archiving, licensing and quality-assured information.

## Pillar 5: Engaging the Audience

12. **Invest in reading participation and Australian-book discovery**, including national reading campaigns, school reading cultures, libraries, book vouchers, author touring, community reading programs and reading data.

## Cross-cutting recommendation

13. **Protect written culture as democratic infrastructure**, including literature's contribution to trusted knowledge, free expression, social cohesion, classification settings, humanities capability and democratic debate.

## The Australian Publishers Association

The APA is the peak national body for Australian book, journal, educational, scholarly and professional publishers. It represents around 220 members, including large and small trade publishers, Australian-owned independent publishers, multinational publishers with substantial Australian publishing programs, educational and scholarly publishers, children's publishers, university presses, First Nations publishers, publishing service providers and other specialist publishing organisations.

APA members support Australian books across the full publishing chain — from development and production to discovery, distribution, sale, borrowing, licensing, export and reading — and account for more than 90 per cent of local publishing turnover. They operate within a broad cultural and commercial ecosystem connecting writers, illustrators, agents, publishers, booksellers, libraries, schools, universities, literary organisations, technology providers and readers.

Industry estimates place Australian book publishing revenue at around \$2 billion, the wider publishing market closer to \$4 billion, and the overall workforce at more than 30,000 people. Each year, around 70 million print books are sold in Australia, while public libraries record around 160 million loans.

### **A whole-of-sector call**

The APA supports the Books Create Australia whole-of-sector call for a National Plan for Books and Reading. Books Create Australia brings together the major national organisations representing authors (ASA), publishers (APA), booksellers (ABA) and libraries (ALIA), and works with a wider coalition across the books, reading and literary sector.

That broad coalition reflects the nature of the policy task. Australian books and reading depend on a connected ecosystem — from writing, publishing and bookselling through to libraries, schools, festivals, literary organisations, accessibility services and readers. Supporting that ecosystem requires coordinated policy across the full book supply chain and across the Commonwealth policy areas that shape books, reading and written culture, including arts, First Nations cultural authority, copyright, communications, education, science, foreign affairs, disability access, industry and social cohesion.

### **Why books matter: culture as civic and knowledge infrastructure**

We welcome the Minister’s recognition that culture should be understood not only as entertainment — although books’ capacity to delight and engage remains central to their value — but also as infrastructure for literacy, learning, cultural self-understanding, social cohesion, civic participation, trusted knowledge and a healthy public sphere. The next National Cultural Policy should build on its emphasis on Australian stories by recognising that culture is also knowledge, memory, argument, education, research and public debate. In a media environment shaped by speed, fragmentation, misinformation and ephemerality, books and other written forms provide edited, attributable and durable works through which Australian stories, ideas and knowledge can be tested, taught, cited, contested, preserved and reused.

## **2. What *Revive* got right — and where the next policy must go further**

*Revive* was a major and welcome reset in national cultural policy. It restored ambition to national arts policy, strengthened arm’s-length cultural investment, placed First Nations culture at the centre, recognised artists as workers as well as creators, and opened cultural policy to commercial and industry-facing settings that had often been treated as outside the arts.

For books and reading, *Revive* established Writing Australia, recognised writing as under-supported, treated copyright as cultural policy, and supported measures including Lending Rights and the Australian Poet Laureate.

However, *Revive* did not yet deliver a coordinated national plan for books and reading, nor fully translate its creative-industries logic into publishing policy. It recognised the importance of creative workers,

intellectual property, technology, export, skills, markets and audience development, but these elements have not yet been brought together for books as a connected national system.

The next National Cultural Policy should complete this work by supporting the full pipeline through which Australian stories, ideas and knowledge are written, edited, published, discovered, licensed, exported, borrowed, bought and read. The goal should be clear: authors have time to write; publishers have capacity to invest; Australian books are discoverable; rights are protected; readers are supported; and public infrastructure connects books with communities.

A dedicated National Plan for Books and Reading should align with the five pillars of *Revive* while providing a clearer policy centre for written culture across arts, education, industry, copyright, First Nations policy, disability access, research, regional development, digital policy, information quality, social cohesion and democratic participation.

### **3. The challenge: growing pressures on Australian books and reading**

The pipeline of new Australian books, and the reading systems that sustain it, are under increasing pressure from supply, demand, systemic and regulatory challenges.

Of greatest concern to publishers, the economics of Australian publishing are becoming harder to sustain. Independent publishers report that rising production, printing, freight, technology, marketing and retail costs are placing acute pressure on already narrow margins, limiting their capacity to take risks and, in some cases, forcing difficult questions about merger, consolidation or long-term viability. Larger commercial and multinational publishers with substantial Australian programs are also becoming more cautious about investment in new Australian titles, as higher unit costs, tighter print-run decisions, uncertain reprint economics and softer demand signals make local publishing riskier. Across the sector, these pressures reduce the capacity to support culturally significant books, literary publishing, First Nations-authored works, children's books, educational resources, scholarly works and Australian-owned intellectual property.

Discoverability pressures are making it harder for Australian books to reach readers, schools, libraries and international markets. These pressures reflect market crowding, global competition, platform-mediated search and recommendation systems, reduced review infrastructure, constrained bookshop and library pathways, uneven school library provision, and gaps in metadata and Australian-content identification. Australian books therefore need stronger pathways into bookshops, classrooms, libraries, digital catalogues, rights markets, public reading campaigns and international promotion.

Copyright risks are intensifying. Generative AI, piracy and practical enforcement challenges threaten the copyright framework that enables authors and publishers to control, license and earn income from their work. Without clear rules based on consent, transparency, licensing, fair payment and enforceable rights, the economic foundations of Australian writing and publishing will be weakened.

Accessibility expectations are rightly growing, including demand for inclusive formats, accessible publishing workflows and better accessibility metadata. Educational publishing faces procurement,

platform, copyright, privacy, AI and curriculum settings that can affect investment in high-quality Australian learning materials. Scholarly and professional publishing face new challenges around research integrity, AI, licensing, trusted knowledge and the discoverability of Australian research.

Australia Reads' submission and research report that reading participation is declining or becoming more uneven, with implications for author income, publisher reinvestment, bookshop viability, library use, educational outcomes and Australian cultural visibility.

Without stronger policy attention, Australia risks a narrower public culture: fewer Australian books, reduced local intellectual property, lower author income, diminished discoverability, reduced accessibility, weaker trusted knowledge systems, and greater dependence on global platforms and imported content.

## 4. Proposed response: a National Plan for Books and Reading

As reflected in the whole-of-sector submission from Books Create Australia, the next National Cultural Policy should establish a dedicated **National Plan for Books and Reading**. The Plan should treat books and reading as a connected national system: from writing, publishing investment and rights management through to production, metadata, distribution, discovery, access, export and reading.

Publishing is central to this system. Publishers turn manuscripts, research, illustration and ideas into public culture by investing in editorial development, design, production, accessibility, metadata, marketing, distribution, rights, licensing and export. A National Plan should back that work not only because Australian books are cultural works, but because they are infrastructure for literacy, learning, trusted knowledge, public debate, social cohesion and democratic life.

Within that Plan, the APA's central task is to strengthen the conditions that allow Australian books to be created, published, discovered, accessed, protected and read. A National Plan should support:

- **creation of new Australian works**, through sustainable author careers and publisher investment;
- **discovery of Australian books**, through bookshops, libraries, schools, festivals, catalogues, metadata systems, public campaigns, accessibility services, rights markets and international pathways;
- **demand for Australian books and reading**, by connecting discovery, reading participation, library access, school engagement and author appearances;
- **rights-respecting AI and enforceable copyright**, based on consent, transparency, licensing, fair payment and practical enforcement.

The following sections translate this proposition into **APA's publisher-facing priorities under the five pillars of Revive**, followed by a cross-cutting recommendation on written culture as democratic infrastructure.

# Pillar 1: First Nations First

## APA priority: Respect First Nations cultural authority in publishing

### Recommendation 1: Build First Nations-led, culturally safe and rights-respecting publishing systems

The APA supports Books Create Australia's call for a National Plan for Books and Reading that places First Nations writing, storytelling, publishing and reading at the centre of national literary policy.

#### **Problem being addressed: emerging First Nations publishing practice and cultural authority**

The emergence of First Nations writing and publishing over the past 65 years, and especially since 2000, has been one of the most significant and welcome achievements in Australian literary life. Its growing presence in schools, libraries, bookshops and public culture has helped recast Australia's understanding of its own experience.

Australia has few First Nations-owned or controlled publishing presses, though Magabala Books in Western Australia provides an important and internationally recognised example. The APA also welcomes recent NSW recommendations and initiatives to strengthen First Nations-led literary and publishing infrastructure. In Queensland, the State Library of Queensland's reduction of literary programming, including Black&Write, has caused concern, although the announced move to deliver Black&Write within a publishing environment may strengthen pathways for First Nations editorial talent if the program is properly resourced and supported. Across the wider sector, editorial practice for First Nations materials is still developing, and publishers, libraries, educators and public agencies face distinctive issues around ICIP, permissions, attribution, metadata, digitisation, AI and discoverability.

#### **Recommended action: protocol-based support for First Nations publishing**

A National Plan should:

- strengthen First Nations-controlled publishing and First Nations-led initiatives, including capacity in editorial development, production, distribution, marketing, metadata, rights management, accessibility and export;
- lift the visibility of contemporary First Nations books in schools, libraries, bookshops, catalogues, campaigns, festivals and author touring; and
- embed ICIP protocols and First Nations data sovereignty across publishing, education, libraries, metadata, digitisation, AI and rights systems.

#### **Outcome sought: First Nations-led publishing infrastructure and cultural authority across the supply chain**

These measures would strengthen First Nations-led publishing infrastructure, support culturally safe pathways for writers and publishers, increase the visibility of contemporary First Nations books, and ensure First Nations cultural authority is respected across the book supply chain.

## Pillar 2: A Place for Every Story

### APA priority: Back the creation and publication of new Australian works

The APA's central concern under this pillar is the maintenance of a publishing pipeline that turns Australian writing, research, illustration and ideas into books, ebooks, audiobooks and journals.

Australian publishers carry the financial, editorial and cultural risks of developing new works, investing in authors, producing books, managing rights, building metadata, securing distribution and sustaining readership. These functions are essential to cultural diversity, but they are increasingly difficult to sustain in a small market facing rising costs, global competition, digital disruption and discoverability challenges.

The APA therefore recommends two complementary mechanisms:

- a stand-alone **Australian Book Fund** for Australian-owned and controlled publishers, to support new Australian content, strengthen local intellectual property, assist production and sustainability costs, and sustain key independent publishing capacity; and
- **creative-industry offsets, rebates or equivalent incentives** for eligible publishers with substantial Australian publishing programs, to support the commercial-scale publication of Australian works across formats.

Together, these measures would support both culturally significant Australian publishing and the commercial-scale Australian publishing programs needed to keep Australian-authored and Australian-originated works visible, viable and available to readers.

## Recommendation 2: Establish an Australian Book Fund for Australian-owned publishers

### Problem being addressed: declining capacity to invest in Australian-owned publishing

Australian-owned publishers play a distinctive role in developing Australian authors, locally owned intellectual property and culturally significant books. More than 40 Australian-owned and controlled publishers operate across the independent trade sector, from micro presses and small publishers to mid-sized firms and larger Australian-owned houses. Many publish lean but culturally significant lists of fiction, narrative non-fiction, poetry, memoir, biography, children's and young adult literature, First Nations writing and regionally based stories.

However, the economic base of this sector is becoming increasingly fragile. APA survey evidence for independent publishers between 2019 and 2024 shows declining title output, falling unit sales, reduced first print runs, rising average costs per title, higher unit costs, lower gross author royalties and a shift from combined profitability to combined losses (*Independent publisher survey 2019–2024*). These pressures are being driven by rising printing, paper, freight, technology and marketing costs; limited domestic market scale; retail discounting; import competition; weaker rights and export capacity; and gaps in digital infrastructure.

The result is a growing threat to the viability and diversity of Australian-owned publishing. Smaller and mid-sized publishers are being forced to reduce risk, narrow lists, lower print runs, defer investment, seek merger or consolidation options, or question long-term viability. Without targeted support, Australia risks fewer Australian-authored books, weaker local intellectual property, reduced literary and cultural risk-taking, lower author income, further consolidation of the publishing ecosystem, and greater dependence on imported content.

### **Proposed mechanism: a dedicated Australian Book Fund for Australian-owned publishers**

The APA recommends a stand-alone **Australian Book Fund** for Australian-owned and controlled publishers, drawing on international precedents such as the Canada Book Fund, which supports access to Canadian-authored books by fostering a strong domestic book industry, including financial support for the production, marketing and distribution of Canadian-authored books. Canada's Publishing Support component is limited to book publishing firms that meet Canadian ownership, control, headquarters and employment requirements, and may provide a useful model for an Australian-owned publishing fund.

The Australian Book Fund should support professional publishers to develop, produce, promote and distribute new Australian works in print, digital, audio and accessible formats. Eligible activity should include:

- **author investment and editorial development**, including advances, royalties, commissioning, editing and proofreading;
- **production and format development**, including design, typesetting, illustration, printing, freight, ebooks, audiobooks and accessible formats;
- **metadata, marketing and discoverability**, including Australian-content metadata, accessibility metadata, publicity, advertising and reader discovery;
- **distribution, rights and market development**, including sales representation, export readiness, translation readiness and rights activity.

The fund should also support adaptation to changing formats and reading behaviours, including Australian-authored audiobooks and, where appropriate, Australian-voiced production. It should assist publishers to manage rising printing and production costs, adapt to changing formats and reading behaviours, and support practical sustainability improvements in production, freight, packaging, returns and supply-chain efficiency.

Eligibility should focus on Australian-owned and controlled publishers that demonstrate professional operations and a clear commitment to publishing Australian authors. The fund should be open to independent trade publishers, not-for-profit presses, university presses and specialist publishers. Funding could include weightings for First Nations-led publishers, regional publishers and publishers with a demonstrated commitment to underrepresented or regional voices.

### **Outcome sought: stronger Australian-owned publishing and more Australian works across formats**

The Australian Book Fund would help arrest the weakening of Australian-owned publishing before further capacity is lost through shrinking lists, reduced print runs, mergers, consolidation or exit from the market.

It would strengthen the long-term viability of key independent trade publishers and sustain their capacity to invest in new Australian-authored works, locally owned intellectual property and culturally significant books.

The Fund would help publishers absorb rising production, printing and freight costs; maintain investment in editorial development, author payments, marketing, metadata, rights and distribution; and continue taking risks on fiction, narrative non-fiction, poetry, children's and young adult literature, First Nations writing, regional stories and other Australian works that may carry high cultural value but uncertain commercial return.

It would also support adaptation to changing reading behaviours and formats, including ebooks, audiobooks and accessible editions. The result would be a more resilient Australian-owned publishing sector, stronger author and publisher income, greater diversity of Australian works, and more Australian stories, ideas and knowledge reaching readers in Australia and internationally.

### **Recommendation 3: Extend creative-industry offsets, rebates or equivalent incentives to Australian publishing**

#### **Problem being addressed: risks to capacity to sustain commercial-scale Australian publishing**

Book publishing is a significant creative industry, but its investment model is under growing pressure. Publishers operating in Australia — including Australian-owned firms and multinational publishers with substantial Australian publishing programs — invest upfront in the development, production, marketing and distribution of a portfolio of new Australian works without certainty of return.

The development of substantial Australian publishing programs over the past 50 years has been a remarkable cultural achievement. Australia has sustained unusually strong levels of locally published and Australian-authored content for a small English-language market, despite lacking the kind of content-support architecture available in some other creative industries. That achievement now needs to be protected.

Confidential industry information available to the APA, together with material provided by some major publishers, confirm that rising costs and market uncertainty are challenging the viability of commercial investment in new Australian-published and Australian-authored works. Rising printing, freight, technology and marketing costs, complex margin structures, small-market economics, cautious print-run decisions and risks to reading participation are limiting publishers' capacity to sustain investment in new Australian titles.

These pressures affect smaller publishers most sharply, but they also constrain larger commercial publishers whose Australian lists depend on careful cross-subsidy, scale, sales confidence and predictable pathways to readers. The policy problem is therefore broader than direct support for independent presses, which is recommended above. It concerns whether Australia has creative-industry settings capable of sustaining the commercial-scale publication of Australian works across the full publishing sector.

## **Proposed mechanism: creative-industry incentives for eligible Australian publishing activity**

The APA recommends that eligible book publishers be included in creative-industry tax offsets, rebates or equivalent production incentives. The scheme should support commercial publishers operating in Australia that demonstrate a substantial commitment to Australian-originated publishing, including Australian-owned publishers and multinational publishers with significant Australian publishing programs.

This should be treated as a central mechanism for engaging with publishing as a creative industry. It should build on book industry advocacy through the NSW tax reform process, as well as preliminary policy planning by Creative Australia and Writing Australia on publishing industry incentives. It should also draw on relevant work in allied creative industries, where offsets, rebates and production incentives are already used to recognise development risk, cultural value, employment, investment and local content creation.

International precedents should inform the design. Ontario, for example, operates a Book Publishing Tax Credit: a refundable tax credit on qualifying expenditure for eligible literary works, including pre-production, marketing, production and costs associated with preparing digital or electronic formats. The Australian scheme need not replicate Ontario's model, but it provides a useful precedent for treating book publishing as a legitimate object of creative-industry fiscal policy.

An Australian offset, rebate or equivalent incentive should support investment in:

- new Australian-authored and Australian-originated books;
- editorial development, design, production, printing and marketing;
- culturally significant works that carry higher cultural than commercial value;
- Australian-owned and Australian-controlled intellectual property;
- Australian-authored audiobooks and other new formats;
- accessible editions, metadata and digital capability;
- export-ready titles, rights sales and translation potential;
- sustainability transition, including lower-emissions production, freight and supply-chain practices.

Eligibility settings should be designed to ensure public benefit. They could include requirements relating to Australian-originated content, professional publishing operations, demonstrated investment in Australian authors, transparent reporting, and expenditure incurred in developing, producing, promoting or distributing Australian works.

The Government should also examine GST settings, grant treatment, production incentives and other fiscal measures — including new publisher-support mechanisms and possible offsets or rebates for bookshops — to ensure they support book access, reading participation, publisher viability, bookshop sustainability and investment in Australian-originated content.

## **Outcome sought: commercial-scale publication of Australian works across formats**

The incentive would help protect one of Australia's major cultural achievements: a book market in which Australian-authored and Australian-originated works remain visible, viable and widely read despite the pressures of a small English-language market, imported content and global platforms.

*Revive* rightly committed the nation to a place for every story. In publishing, that means maintaining the conditions that allow many kinds of Australian stories — literary, commercial, children's, First Nations, regional, popular and public-interest — to be developed, published and promoted at scale.

As in screen and music, cultural policy should help sustain Australian content, audience share and cultural visibility. A publishing incentive would support commercial-scale Australian output across print, digital, audio, accessible and export-ready formats, while helping publishers manage rising costs, protect locally generated intellectual property, and keep Australian stories, knowledge and ideas visible to readers in Australia and internationally.

## **Pillar 3: Centrality of the Artist**

### **APA priority: Support authors, illustrators, translators and fair copyright**

For the book sector, the centrality of the artist means strengthening the economic foundations of authorship, illustration and translation through fair remuneration, sustainable careers and effective rights protection.

*Revive* rightly recognised copyright as cultural policy: a mechanism that incentivises new work, protects intellectual property and supports investment in books and other cultural forms. It also committed to modernising Lending Rights and reviewing copyright enforcement.

Since *Revive*, generative AI has made these issues more urgent. Australian authors, illustrators, publishers and First Nations communities must be able to control, license and be fairly paid for the use of their work in AI-enabled systems.

For the APA, the two priorities under this pillar are protecting copyright through rights-respecting AI settings, and strengthening Lending Rights as core cultural infrastructure.

## **Recommendation 4: Protect copyright and ensure rights-respecting AI**

### **Problem being addressed: AI risks to copyright, creator income and trusted knowledge**

Copyright is fundamental to Australian publishing. It gives authors and illustrators control over their work, enables publishers to invest in Australian writing, research, education and culture, and underpins trusted access to books and published knowledge.

Generative AI has brought these risks to a head. Around the world, authors, publishers, journalists, artists and other creators have reacted with justified anger to the mass scraping and ingestion of copyright works without permission, transparency, licensing or payment. International litigation against AI companies reflects a basic proposition: creative and knowledge works are not free raw material for private technology platforms.

For Australian publishing, the risks are immediate. Unauthorised use of Australian books and published content threatens author income, publisher investment, educational quality, research integrity, reader trust and Australian cultural sovereignty. It also creates a sovereign cultural risk if Australian stories, scholarship, educational materials and First Nations cultural content are absorbed into opaque, foreign-controlled systems that do not reflect Australian law, values, cultural authority or public-interest obligations.

The APA welcomes the Australian Government's recognition of copyright in AI policy, including its decision to rule out a text and data mining exception. The ongoing work of the Copyright and AI Reference Group should reinforce lawful access, direct licensing, consent, transparency and fair payment.

The policy problem is not simply how to encourage innovation. It is how to prevent headlong AI development from overriding the rights, livelihoods, cultural authority and sovereign interests of the people and organisations whose work these systems depend on. Australia should support innovation, but not innovation built on uncompensated extraction.

## **Proposed mechanism: consent, licensing, transparency and enforceable rights**

**The next National Cultural Policy should anchor AI and copyright policy in rights-respecting settings based on:**

- **consent**, so rightsholders provide permission for the use of their works in AI training and related AI systems;
- **voluntary and direct licensing**, with licensing led by rightsholders and direct licensing preserved wherever authors, publishers and other rightsholders are able to license directly;
- **fair payment**, so Australian books and published content are not used as uncompensated inputs for AI systems;
- **transparency and provenance**, including training-data disclosure, content provenance and rights-compliance obligations;
- **practical enforcement**, including clearer remedies, stronger compliance expectations and effective civil and criminal enforcement where appropriate;
- **cultural authority and rights-aware infrastructure**, including respect for ICIP and First Nations data sovereignty;
- **lawful access for preservation, literacy, research and education**, through trusted digital systems that do not bypass copyright, licensing or remuneration.

Australia should develop fit-for-purpose AI transparency and compliance settings, informed by international approaches and the proposals of the Senate Select Committee on Adopting Artificial Intelligence. Authors, publishers and other rightsholders need meaningful transparency so they can assess whether their works have been used, test compliance and enforce their rights. AI providers should be required to publish and comply with intellectual property policies covering copyright, related rights,

trademarks and ICIP; disclose meaningful information about training data, content provenance and rights compliance; prohibit infringing uses through their terms of use; ensure their own development, training and deployment practices comply with intellectual property law; implement reasonable measures to prevent and track infringement; and maintain effective complaints and corrective-action processes.

Legitimate research, education and public-interest uses of copyright material should be protected, but must not become indirect permissions for AI training, mass copying or platform development without consent, licensing and remuneration. In schools, universities and TAFEs, third-party materials used in AI-enabled teaching, learning, research or administrative systems should continue to be captured and remunerated through appropriate statutory or direct licences.

The Commonwealth should act as an exemplar in AI procurement and use. Public agencies should procure and deploy AI tools only where copyright compliance, provenance, licensing arrangements and respect for First Nations cultural materials can be demonstrated.

The APA welcomes Assistant Minister Andrew Charlton's emphasis on sovereign Australian AI capability and trusted domain-specific systems. For the book, education and research sectors, that capability must be built on lawful access, licensed content, quality-assured information, trusted knowledge systems, editorial and peer-review standards, and enforceable rights. Sovereign AI should strengthen Australian cultural and knowledge infrastructure, not extract value from it.

The Australian Copyright Council could play a strengthened role in copyright literacy, licensing guidance and sector capability. Any collective or centralised licensing facilitation should support — not displace — direct licensing. The APA also recommends an urgent national report on AI's impact on authors, illustrators, publishers, educational and scholarly publishing, libraries, readers, research integrity, educational quality and Australian content visibility.

### **Outcome sought: lawful AI innovation that protects creators, publishers and Australian content**

Rights-respecting AI policy would protect creator income, publisher investment and Australian cultural sovereignty while enabling lawful innovation. It would support trusted knowledge systems, educational quality, research integrity, lawful access and reader trust.

It would also ensure that Australian books, educational resources, scholarly works and First Nations cultural materials are not treated as unlicensed inputs for AI systems, but as protected works produced through labour, investment, expertise, rights and cultural authority.

## **Recommendation 5: Maintain Lending Rights as core cultural infrastructure**

### **Problem being addressed: fair remuneration for public and educational library use**

Libraries are essential public reading infrastructure: they provide free public and educational access to books, support reading participation, and help Australian works reach communities across the country. But

public access must be matched by fair remuneration for the authors, illustrators and publishers whose work sustains library collections.

Australia's Public Lending Right and Educational Lending Right schemes are central to that balance. The APA welcomes recent reforms, including the extension of Lending Rights to ebooks and audiobooks, and the recent bipartisan support for legislation strengthening the lending rights framework.

### **Proposed mechanism: strengthened Lending Rights tied to library lending and public access**

A National Plan for Books and Reading should build on these reforms by maintaining and strengthening Lending Rights as a major cultural policy instrument, not a marginal remuneration scheme. They recognise that free public and educational access to books depends on the continuing creative labour of authors and illustrators and the investment of publishers. Future settings should support:

- **fair remuneration for authors, illustrators and publishers**, benchmarked against the impact of public and educational library borrowing on book markets, sales and creator income;
- **continued availability of Australian books** in public and educational library collections;
- **publisher reinvestment and long-term sustainability** of Australian writing, illustration and publishing.

Lending Rights should remain tied to library lending and public access. They should not become a back door for AI training, text and data mining, large-scale digitisation, platform use or other secondary uses of library-held or publisher-owned materials. Those uses require separate rights frameworks based on consent, licensing, fair payment, transparency and enforceable rights.

### **Outcome sought: fair creator and publisher remuneration alongside free public access**

Stronger Lending Rights would support creator income, publisher reinvestment, Australian books in libraries and schools, and the broader public value of free access to reading. They recognise that library access and creator remuneration are complementary cultural policy goals.

## **Pillar 4: Strong Cultural Infrastructure**

### **APA priority: Build the institutions, systems and knowledge infrastructure that sustain Australian books**

The National Plan should treat books and reading as a national system requiring coordinated infrastructure. For the APA, this means strengthening Writing Australia while funding major book-sector measures separately; building national book data, metadata, rights and supply-chain infrastructure; establishing Books Australia to promote Australian books domestically and internationally; supporting born-accessible publishing; recognising educational, scholarly and professional publishing as creative and knowledge infrastructure; and clarifying the role of libraries and specialist agencies in documenting, preserving and promoting Australian written culture.

## **Recommendation 6: Strengthen Writing Australia as the national literature agency, while funding major book-sector infrastructure separately**

### **Problem being addressed: an under-resourced national literature agency**

*Revive* established Writing Australia as a dedicated national body for literature. This was a major and welcome step, but its current funding envelope does not match the breadth of its mandate or the scale of the task now before it.

As the Minister has publicly acknowledged, literature remains one of Australia's most underfunded art forms. This is striking given written culture's foundational role in civic society and its wider public value: supporting literacy, education, trusted knowledge, cultural memory, public debate, social cohesion and democratic participation. The gap is compounded by uneven state and territory investment in authors, publishing, literary organisations and literary infrastructure.

The APA's concern is that Writing Australia has been given a broad national role without the resources needed to fulfil it. It risks being asked to support literary development, sector coordination, research, policy advice, national partnerships, program delivery and specialist literary infrastructure from a funding base that is too small for the task.

Writing Australia also needs capacity to engage with publishing as both a creative industry and a cultural system. Publishing is not only the mechanism by which literary works reach readers; it is a structured industry that invests in intellectual property, takes development risk, employs specialist labour, manages rights and metadata, builds markets, and sustains the systems through which Australian books are produced, distributed, licensed, exported and read.

A meaningful national literature agency also needs the capacity to work with and support specialist agencies and knowledge systems — including AustLit, the National Centre of Biography and other literary, bibliographic and research bodies — that help document, interpret and make visible Australia's written culture.

### **Proposed mechanism: a better-funded Writing Australia with major infrastructure funded separately**

The APA recommends that the National Plan for Books and Reading substantially strengthen Writing Australia as the institutional anchor for literature, with expanded funding and a clear mandate to support:

- writers' centres, literary organisations and service bodies;
- festivals, journals, little magazines and review publications;
- children's literature, reading and literacy organisations;
- paid author appearances, professional development, mentorships, residencies and fellowships;
- sector development, research, consultation and policy advice;
- cross-portfolio policy and strategic work across arts, education, industry, copyright, First Nations policy, disability access, research, digital policy, regional development and social cohesion;

- engagement with publishing as both a creative industry and a cultural system, including its roles in investment, intellectual property, rights management, metadata, markets, distribution, export and access;
- specialist literary and bibliographic agencies, including AustLit, the National Centre of Biography and related research infrastructure;
- national coordination with state and territory governments, industry, universities, publishers, libraries and the wider literary sector.

Writing Australia should also have the capacity to lead and undertake strategic policy work across portfolios where books, writing, publishing and reading intersect with national priorities. This should include work on reading participation, literary infrastructure, publishing as a creative industry, copyright and AI, educational and scholarly publishing, accessibility, research integrity, cultural diplomacy and the role of written culture in public life.

It should also be able to generate and commission stronger national evidence about written culture in its broadest sense: books, writing, publishing, reading, journals, criticism, educational and scholarly publishing, digital writing, literary organisations, festivals and public literary life. This should include regular data, statistics, mapping and reporting to help the sector and government understand the state of Australian written culture and tell its story to Australians.

### **Outcome sought: national literary leadership without overloading Writing Australia**

A properly funded Writing Australia would give literature a stronger national institutional base and allow it to serve the national interest at appropriate scale. It would support authors, literary organisations, journals, festivals, reading bodies, specialist agencies, publishing-sector engagement and sector development, while generating the evidence needed to understand and promote Australian written culture.

However, Writing Australia should not be expected to absorb the full cost of national books-and-reading policy from its existing budget. The National Plan should separately fund major measures such as an Australian Book Fund, stronger Lending Rights, national reading investment, book data and metadata infrastructure, born-accessible publishing, Books Australia, bookshop and library infrastructure, and support for educational, scholarly and professional publishing.

### **Related institutional note: libraries and Australia's written culture**

Libraries are valued allies of authors and publishers, and fundamental to Australian written culture through their roles in reading, literacy, discovery, preservation, research and public access. A National Plan for Books and Reading should therefore consider whether the **legislative framework for the National Library of Australia** adequately reflects its contemporary role in Australia's wider literary infrastructure, noting that similar issues arise for state and territory libraries, although they sit outside the direct remit of Commonwealth cultural policy.

National, state and territory libraries are not only collecting institutions. Through legal deposit, public discovery, fellowships and support for authors, publishing activity, events and public programs, and partnerships with specialist agencies such as AustLit, they play an active role in preserving, describing, interpreting and promoting Australian books, authorship, publishing, reading and cultural identity.

A modernised framework should recognise libraries as active partners in literary infrastructure, while encouraging shared guidelines for digital and AI uses of literary and published materials — including digitisation, discovery tools, collection analysis and public-facing services. These uses should proceed with appropriate lawful authority, consent where required, transparency and rights management. This would help make Australian books and literary culture more visible and usable while respecting the authors and publishers who sustain them.

## **Recommendation 7: Build national book data, metadata, rights and supply-chain infrastructure**

### **Problem being addressed: weak data, metadata and rights infrastructure for Australian books**

Australian books depend on data and metadata systems that are largely invisible to readers but essential to whether books can be discovered, accessed, sold, borrowed, licensed, exported and measured. At present, Australia lacks sufficiently coordinated national data infrastructure to understand, measure and strengthen the full lifecycle of Australian books — from creation, description and distribution through to discovery, purchase, borrowing, licensing, export and reading.

Gaps in metadata, accessibility data, rights information and Australian-content identification make it harder for Australian books to be found by readers, recommended by booksellers, selected by libraries, adopted by schools, licensed for translation, promoted internationally and understood by policymakers. They also limit the sector's capacity to improve supply-chain efficiency, manage sustainability pressures, support lawful licensing and tell a clear evidence-based story about the value and circulation of Australian books.

### **Proposed mechanism: coordinated national book data and metadata infrastructure**

The APA recommends that the National Plan for Books and Reading include investment in national book data, metadata, rights and supply-chain infrastructure, developed in partnership with publishers, booksellers, libraries, distributors, authors' organisations, universities, accessibility organisations, technology providers and relevant public agencies.

This work should support:

- **metadata enrichment and Australian-content identifiers** for Australian-authored and Australian-published books, including subject, audience, curriculum, format, territorial and rights information;
- **accessibility metadata** so accessible editions and features can be identified by readers, booksellers, libraries, schools and procurement systems;
- **rights, permissions and licensing data** to support lawful use, direct licensing, translation, export, education, research and AI-related rights management;
- **supply-chain data and interoperability** to improve ordering, availability, forecasting, distribution, returns management and sustainability;

- **evidence on buying, borrowing, reading and discovery patterns** to inform cultural policy, reading policy and industry planning;
- **sector capability, benchmarks and reporting**, including tools and training for smaller publishers and regular tracking of Australian books' creation, circulation, discoverability, accessibility and readership.

This infrastructure should build on existing industry systems and expertise rather than duplicate them. It should strengthen the data environment around Australian books while supporting interoperability between publishers, booksellers, libraries, schools, rights markets, accessibility services, digital platforms and public agencies.

### **Outcome sought: better discoverability, licensing, accessibility, export and policy evidence**

Stronger national book data, metadata, rights and supply-chain infrastructure would improve the discoverability, accessibility, licensing, export potential and policy visibility of Australian books.

It would help readers find Australian works, support booksellers and libraries to promote them, assist schools and universities to identify appropriate titles, enable lawful licensing and rights activity, improve supply-chain efficiency, and give governments a stronger evidence base for cultural policy. It would also help the sector tell its own story: how Australian books are created, circulated, discovered, accessed and read.

## **Recommendation 8: Establish *Books Australia* to promote Australian books at home and overseas**

### **Problem being addressed: weak domestic and international visibility for Australian books**

Australian books have strong cultural and commercial potential, but they lack a dedicated national mechanism for domestic promotion, reader discovery, rights sales, translation, export development and international cultural diplomacy. Discoverability problems affect both domestic and international markets: Australian books can be difficult for readers, teachers, librarians, booksellers, rights buyers, translators and international publishers to find, assess and promote.

At present, Australia has no equivalent to a national book discovery platform, nor a sustained book-export body comparable to Sounds Australia in music. This limits the visibility of Australian books, reduces rights and translation opportunities, and weakens Australia's capacity to promote its stories, knowledge and ideas at scale.

### **Proposed mechanism: a national book promotion, discovery, rights and export initiative**

The APA recommends establishing **Books Australia** as a national promotion, discovery, rights and export initiative for Australian books.

Books Australia should have two connected functions.

**First, an international rights, export and cultural diplomacy function, modelled in part on *Sounds Australia* and international book-export bodies such as Livres Canada Books / Rights Canada. This could include:**

- international rights sales, translation and export-readiness support;
- market intelligence, trade missions and publisher delegations;
- collective Australian stands at major international book fairs;
- digital rights catalogues for Australian titles;
- international promotion of First Nations writing and Australian literature;
- cultural diplomacy and global visibility for Australian stories, knowledge and ideas.

**Second, a domestic discovery and promotion function, modelled in part on initiatives such as Canada's *49th Shelf*. This could include:**

- a public-facing Australian books discovery platform;
- curated promotion of new Australian releases, including First Nations, children's, literary, educational and culturally significant works;
- searchable information on Australian authors, illustrators, publishers and titles;
- reader pathways through bookshops, libraries, schools and festivals;
- campaign assets for booksellers, libraries, schools, festivals and reading organisations;
- integration with metadata systems and Australian-content identifiers.

Books Australia should be developed as a partnership between government and the book industry's national peak bodies, with delivery shaped through collaboration with publishers, authors, booksellers, libraries, rights agents, festivals, Writing Australia, Creative Australia, DFAT, Austrade and state literary bodies. It should complement, not replace, existing publisher, bookseller, library, rights-market and export activity.

### **Outcome sought: stronger pathways from Australian books to readers and rights markets**

Books Australia would give Australian books a stronger domestic and international presence. Internationally, it would expand rights sales, translation opportunities, export revenue and cultural visibility. Domestically, it would improve discovery, support reading participation, and help readers, schools, libraries, bookshops and festivals identify and promote Australian titles.

The result would be stronger pathways from Australian books to readers, communities and markets: better discoverability, more rights activity, greater cultural diplomacy, and more opportunities for Australian authors and publishers.

## Recommendation 9: Fund born-accessible publishing and inclusive discoverability

### Problem being addressed: uneven access to Australian books for readers with print disability

Accessible publishing is both a public-interest access issue and an industry transition challenge. According to the Round Table on Information Access for People with Print Disabilities, more than 18 per cent of adult Australians experience print disability, yet Australian books are not consistently available in formats that can be independently read using assistive technologies. The shift to born-accessible publishing will require new workflows, technical capability, accessibility metadata, platform coordination, training and quality assurance across the book supply chain.

This transition should not be treated simply as a new obligation for publishers to absorb within already pressured commercial settings. It is a national reading, equity and cultural access objective that should be facilitated by the government in partnership with publishers, libraries, disability organisations, specialist format producers, technology providers and accessibility experts.

Without public investment and coordination, accessibility risks remain uneven and ad hoc, particularly for smaller publishers and less commercially secure Australian works. This would limit reading equity, reduce the reach of Australian books, weaken the impact of public investment in libraries and reading programs, and slow Australia's progress toward accessible cultural participation.

### Proposed mechanism: government-supported transition to born-accessible publishing

The APA recommends that the National Plan for Books and Reading include dedicated government investment to support the transition to born-accessible publishing and inclusive discoverability, drawing on international precedents such as Canada's Accessible Digital Books Initiative and adapted to Australian industry conditions.

This should support:

- **born-accessible publishing workflows and inclusive digital formats**, including accessible ebooks and other digital editions;
- **accessibility metadata** so accessible editions and features can be identified through retailers, libraries, school procurement systems, catalogues, metadata platforms and digital reading services;
- **technical support, training and guidance** for publishers;
- **accessible editions** of new Australian books and selected backlist titles;
- **coordination between publishers, libraries, disability organisations, specialist format producers, technology providers and accessibility specialists**, including appropriate use of AI tools subject to human oversight, quality assurance, rights compliance and safeguards against bias.

This investment should complement sustainable support for specialist alternative-format producers, including braille, audio, tactile and other formats needed by readers with print disability.

### **Outcome sought: accessible Australian books without imposing an unfunded transition on publishers**

Government-supported accessible publishing would make accessibility part of the ordinary production, distribution and discovery of Australian books without imposing an unfunded transition on publishers. It would expand readership, support equity and inclusion, strengthen industry capability, improve access for people with print disability and other access needs, and ensure Australian books are visible and available across print, digital, audio and accessible formats

## **Recommendation 10: Recognise educational publishing as creative and knowledge infrastructure**

### **Problem being addressed: educational publishing treated too narrowly as procurement**

Educational publishing is a core part of Australia's written culture, creative economy and education infrastructure, but it is often treated narrowly as a procurement category rather than as a sector that creates and invests in Australian learning content. Educational publishers support literacy, curriculum implementation, teacher capability, accessibility, local intellectual property, workforce skills, First Nations content, and Australian stories and perspectives in classrooms. Yet education departments, procurement systems and platform policies do not always engage with publishers as expert creators, investors and rights holders in that content.

Statutory licences should be understood as mechanisms that enable lawful educational access while sustaining content creation. They should not be treated simply as cost-minimisation tools in ways that ultimately reduce the creation, quality, diversity and availability of Australian educational content.

### **Proposed mechanism: whole-of-government recognition of educational publishing and statutory licensing**

The next National Cultural Policy should recognise educational publishing as part of Australia's creative and knowledge infrastructure and include it within a National Plan for Books and Reading. Governments, education departments and educational institutions should engage with publishers as partners in creating, licensing and improving Australian learning content, not merely as procurement suppliers.

A National Plan should recognise educational publishing's role in literacy, curriculum implementation, Australian and First Nations content, trusted learning resources, teacher support, accessibility, local intellectual property and workforce skills. The Commonwealth should provide stronger cross-jurisdictional leadership so education departments, procurement systems, curriculum bodies, schools, universities and cultural agencies work constructively with publishers on curriculum, procurement, platform, privacy, AI and copyright settings.

The Copyright Advisory Group should also be reviewed and, where appropriate, incorporated into or formally linked with the new Teaching and Learning Commission. Its terms of reference should recognise both lawful educational access and the sustainability of Australian content creation, with creators, publishers and other rights holders represented alongside education-system users.

### **Outcome sought: stronger Australian learning resources, curriculum support and educational content creation**

Recognising educational publishing as creative and knowledge infrastructure and working with educational publishers as partners would support literacy, curriculum quality, teacher capability, accessibility, Australian content in classrooms and the continuing production of trusted local learning resources.

It would also improve whole-of-government policy making by ensuring that education, copyright, procurement and cultural policy support — rather than inadvertently weakening — the publishers, authors, illustrators and rights holders who sustain Australia’s educational content system.

## **Recommendation 11: Engage with research and scholarly publishing as trusted knowledge infrastructure**

### **Problem being addressed: trusted knowledge under pressure**

Australia faces growing risks to the shared conditions of truth, evidence and public knowledge. Anti-scientism, conspiracy thinking, tribalism, misinformation, low-quality AI-generated content and the elevation of subjective experience into untested truth claims all weaken the systems through which societies test evidence, distinguish knowledge from assertion, and sustain informed public debate.

All forms of publishing contribute to public understanding. Fiction can disclose deeper human, social and historical truths through imagination. Non-fiction draws on traditions of essay, memoir, journalism, description, observation and inquiry. Research and scholarly publishing has a particular role within this wider ecology because it supports the formal processes through which knowledge is tested, edited, peer reviewed, certified, preserved, indexed, discovered and contested.

Journals, university presses, learned-society publications and professional publishers should therefore not be treated merely as suppliers to universities or libraries, or as expenditure lines to be reduced. They are part of Australia’s trusted knowledge infrastructure: the system through which research, evidence and expert knowledge are assessed, published, preserved and made available for professional practice, public reasoning and democratic life.

### **Proposed mechanism: structured engagement with research and scholarly publishing**

The National Cultural Policy should engage with research and scholarly publishing as part of Australia’s trusted knowledge infrastructure, and support structured dialogue between publishers, DISR, education, research agencies, universities, libraries, learned societies and cultural agencies.

This engagement should address:

- research integrity, publication ethics, misinformation and AI-generated low-quality content;
- peer review, editorial quality, Australian journals, university presses and learned-society publishing;
- metadata, indexing, archiving and discoverability for Australian scholarly outputs;
- rights, licensing and lawful access across research, education, libraries and digital systems;
- quality-assured published knowledge in AI-enabled research, education and public-sector systems.

### **Outcome sought: stronger trusted knowledge systems**

This engagement would strengthen research integrity, evidence-based debate, professional practice and public trust. It would ensure government treats research and scholarly publishing not simply as a cost, but as part of the national infrastructure through which knowledge is tested, edited, published, preserved, discovered and used.

## **Pillar 5: Engaging the Audience**

### **APA priority: Build reading participation and demand for Australian books**

The APA supports Australia Reads' call for the next National Cultural Policy to invest in a reading nation. Reading is a cultural, educational and civic practice, as well as a foundation for individual imagination, social participation, lifelong learning and democratic life. Australian publishing also depends on reading participation: Australian books need readers, readers need clear pathways to books, and publishers need sustained demand to reinvest in Australian authors and new Australian works. This aligns with Australia Reads' emphasis on national reading campaigns, school reading cultures, access to books, Australian and First Nations stories, author touring, book vouchers, data and community reading infrastructure.

### **Recommendation 12: Invest in reading participation and Australian-book discovery**

#### **Problem being addressed: declining or uneven reading participation and weak discovery**

Reading participation is under pressure. Many Australians face barriers to reading, including limited skills and confidence, digital distraction, weak discovery pathways, uneven access to books, inconsistent school library provision, and limited visibility of Australian stories.

For publishers, this is also a market sustainability issue. Sales and reading of Australian titles form a virtuous circle: stronger reading participation creates demand for Australian books; stronger discovery helps readers find them; stronger sales allow publishers to reinvest in authors and new titles; and stronger

publishing output gives bookshops, libraries, schools, festivals and media more Australian works to promote.

## **Proposed mechanism: national reading investment and Australian-book discovery measures**

The National Plan should invest in reading participation and Australian-book discovery through:

- **national reading campaigns** for adults, young people, children and families;
- **stronger school reading cultures**, including school libraries, collection funding and home reading support;
- **improved access to books** in regional, rural, remote and underserved communities, including through book vouchers or cultural vouchers;
- **promotion of Australian and First Nations books** through bookshops, libraries, schools, festivals, public campaigns and community reading programs;
- **paid author and illustrator touring** through schools, libraries, bookshops and regional communities;
- **stronger reading data and evidence**, including reading rates, discovery pathways, buying and borrowing patterns across print, audio and ebooks.

Content quotas or Australian-content obligations, where considered in cultural or educational settings, should be designed carefully. They can improve visibility and demand for Australian books, but also have implications for supply, rights, procurement, library collections, school use, discoverability and publisher capacity. Any such measures should be developed with publishers, authors, booksellers, libraries and educators.

## **Outcome sought: more Australians reading, discovering and valuing Australian books**

Investment in reading participation would help more Australians read more often, strengthen demand for Australian books, and improve the visibility of Australian and First Nations stories. It would support readers, families, schools, libraries, bookshops and festivals, while strengthening the market conditions that allow publishers to reinvest in Australian authors and new Australian works. The goal is not only literacy, but the active use of reading for personal growth, shared understanding, lifelong learning, civic participation and collective good: a reading nation in which Australian stories, knowledge and ideas are created, published, discovered, read and valued.

## **Cross-cutting recommendation: Protect written culture as democratic infrastructure**

Beyond the five pillars, the next National Cultural Policy should recognise written culture as democratic infrastructure: the system through which Australians encounter ideas, test arguments, access trusted knowledge, understand one another and participate in civic life.

## **Recommendation 13: Protect the contribution of books and literature to democratic life**

### **Problem being addressed: written culture under pressure in a fragmented public sphere**

In a public sphere shaped by digital platforms, accelerated opinion, misinformation and polarised cultural debate, books retain a distinctive democratic role. They are slower, durable forms of public argument: edited, attributable works that can be debated, taught, cited, preserved and returned to across generations.

Books, periodicals, criticism, scholarship and libraries have long helped citizens form opinions, encounter difference, test authority, understand history and participate in public life. That function depends on free expression, intellectual freedom and a broad publishing culture. Cultural policy should resist heavy-handed state restriction and informal gatekeeping that narrows what can be written, published, stocked, taught, reviewed, borrowed or read.

Classification should protect children and provide useful public guidance without creating chilling effects, overbroad restrictions or uncertainty for authors, publishers, educators, booksellers, libraries and readers. A National Plan for Books and Reading should treat written culture not as mere entertainment, school content, library stock or regulated material, but as democratic infrastructure.

### **Proposed mechanism: protect books, literature and publishing as democratic infrastructure**

The next National Cultural Policy should protect and strengthen the role of books, literature and publishing in Australia's public sphere by:

- recognising books, periodicals, criticism, scholarship, educational resources and research publishing as infrastructure for democratic life;
- supporting literature's role in social cohesion, including the capacity to tell shared, diverse and contested Australian stories;
- strengthening trusted information systems, including educational, scholarly and professional publishing;
- protecting freedom of expression and the legitimate circulation of literary, educational, scholarly and public-interest works;
- maintaining a workable classification scheme that protects children and provides community guidance without creating chilling effects, overbroad restrictions or uncertainty for authors, publishers, educators, libraries and readers;
- supporting the pipeline of humanities, writing, publishing, education and knowledge workers, including through higher education fee settings that do not discourage study in the humanities and related fields.

## **Outcome sought: trusted knowledge, free expression, social cohesion and democratic debate**

This would ensure that the next National Cultural Policy recognises books and literature not only as cultural works, but as civic infrastructure. It would support a literate public, a trusted knowledge base, freedom of expression, social cohesion, cultural memory and democratic debate beyond the speed and fragmentation of digital media.

## **Conclusion: a National Plan for Books and Reading**

Australia's next National Cultural Policy should recognise books and publishing as foundational cultural and knowledge infrastructure. The central policy challenge is not only whether Australian stories are told, but whether Australia has the investment mechanisms, rights frameworks, market infrastructure, public institutions and reading culture needed to sustain the full pipeline of Australian stories, ideas and knowledge — and ensure they reach readers.

The APA supports the Books Create Australia call for a dedicated **National Plan for Books and Reading** — and the allied submissions from the Australian Booksellers Association, Australian Library and Information Association, Australian Society of Authors and Australia Reads, alongside specific expertise such as from the Round Table on Information Access for People with Print Disabilities. Within that whole-of-sector framework, the APA urges the Australian Government to prioritise publisher-facing measures that sustain Australian content, protect rights, improve discoverability, expand access, strengthen export, support reading participation and maintain the viability of Australian publishing.

A National Plan for Books and Reading should include:

1. **First Nations cultural authority in publishing**, including First Nations-led publishing, ICIP protocols, First Nations data sovereignty and culturally safe publishing practice.
2. **An Australian Book Fund** for Australian-owned publishers, to support new Australian-authored works, local intellectual property, culturally significant publishing and production across print, digital, audio, accessible and export-ready formats.
3. **Creative-industry offsets, rebates or equivalent incentives for publishing**, to sustain commercial-scale Australian publishing output, market share and cultural visibility.
4. **Rights-respecting AI and copyright protection**, based on consent, direct and voluntary licensing, fair payment, transparency, provenance and practical enforcement.
5. **Stronger Lending Rights**, recognising the contribution of authors, illustrators and publishers to free public and educational access through libraries.
6. **A stronger Writing Australia**, with the funding, mandate and policy capacity to lead national literary development, while major book-sector infrastructure measures are funded separately.
7. **National book data, metadata, rights and supply-chain infrastructure**, to improve discoverability, accessibility, licensing, export, supply-chain efficiency and policy evidence.
8. **Books Australia**, to promote Australian books domestically and internationally through discovery, rights sales, translation, export development and cultural diplomacy.
9. **Born-accessible publishing and inclusive discoverability**, supported by government investment in workflows, formats, metadata, training, coordination and specialist accessible formats.

10. **Recognition of educational publishing as creative and knowledge infrastructure**, including its role in literacy, curriculum, teacher support, Australian content, statutory licensing and local intellectual property.
11. **Engagement with research and scholarly publishing as trusted knowledge infrastructure**, including research integrity, peer review, publication ethics, metadata, licensing and quality-assured knowledge in AI-enabled systems.
12. **National investment in reading participation and Australian-book discovery**, including campaigns, school reading cultures, libraries, vouchers, author touring, community reading programs and reading data.
13. **Protection of written culture as democratic infrastructure**, including free expression, trusted knowledge, social cohesion, workable classification settings, humanities capability and democratic debate.

Together, these measures would strengthen the systems that carry Australian stories, knowledge and ideas from authors and publishers to readers. They would support investment and reinvestment in Australian books; fair remuneration for authors, illustrators and publishers; lawful rights and licensing systems; discoverability, accessibility and export opportunities; trusted knowledge, educational quality and research integrity; and a stronger reading culture.

The APA would welcome the opportunity to work with the Australian Government, Writing Australia, Books Create Australia and sector partners on the design and implementation of this plan.

**Further Information:**

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