



# Submission to the National Cultural Policy Consultation

## *A National Plan for Books and Reading: Ensuring Australian stories and ideas are created, discovered and read*

### OVERVIEW

**Books are national cultural and knowledge infrastructure:** Books Create Australia urges the Australian Government to develop a **National Plan for Books and Reading** in the next National Cultural Policy. Books are central to Australian creativity, cultural expression, knowledge, research and public debate. They support democratic participation, First Nations cultural expression, literacy, learning and community life.

**Books Create Australia represents the national book ecosystem:** Books Create Australia brings together major organisations across Australia's book ecosystem, spanning writing, publishing, bookselling, libraries, literary development, accessibility and reading. This ecosystem is essential cultural, educational, commercial and civic infrastructure: it creates and circulates Australian stories, ideas and knowledge and, on industry figures, supports 30,000+ professionals, 25,000+ new Australian titles each year, 160+ million public library loans, 70+ million books sold annually, and a market estimated at \$4 billion.

**The book ecosystem is under pressure:** This ecosystem is under serious pressure. Authors face insecure incomes; publishers and booksellers face rising costs; Australian books face global competition and discoverability challenges; libraries and literary infrastructure are unevenly supported; reading participation is declining; and AI presents urgent risks to copyright, cultural sovereignty, creator income and the visibility of Australian content.

**A National Plan should support the full books and reading ecosystem:** Because books and reading contribute to cultural identity, education, health, social cohesion, research, economic participation and democratic life, Australia needs a cross-portfolio National Plan for Books and Reading, developed with the sector and backed by dedicated investment. The

plan should support the whole pipeline of Australian books and reading: First Nations cultural authority; authors and illustrators; publishers and booksellers; copyright and creator rights; libraries and literary organisations; data, metadata, accessibility and discoverability; export and rights opportunities; and national reading participation.

**This submission sets out practical actions across the Government's five pillars:** Structured around the Government's five pillars, this proposal recommends coordinated measures to respect First Nations storytelling and cultural authority; back Australian books, publishers and locally owned intellectual property; support authors, illustrators and copyright; strengthen Writing Australia, libraries, bookshops, literary organisations and discovery infrastructure; and build a national culture of reading.

### ***Pillar 1: First Nations First: Respect First Nations cultural authority***

First Nations writing, storytelling, languages and cultural knowledge should be central to the next National Cultural Policy. This requires not only recognition but First Nations leadership. Current publishing and associated metadata, AI and rights systems do not always adequately recognise the cultural authority of First Nations peoples.

The Australian Government should establish a First Nations-led framework for writing and publishing to:

- fund First Nations authors, publishers, literary organisations, and First Nations-led writing, publishing and reading programs, including in Indigenous communities and languages;
- lift the visibility of contemporary First Nations books within schools, libraries, bookshops, campaigns and author touring;
- embed Indigenous Cultural and Intellectual Property protocols and data sovereignty across Writing Australia, festivals, education, libraries, digital infrastructure, AI and metadata, with clear requirements for consent, attribution, rights management and benefit-sharing.

First Nations stories are not simply content. They carry cultural authority, community obligations and rights requiring protection, resourcing and leadership.

### ***Pillar 2: A Place for Every Story: Back Australian books and publishers***

Australia needs a strong publishing sector that can invest in Australian stories, knowledge and ideas, connect them with readers, and strengthen books' foundational role in culture, education and democratic life. Yet rising costs and discoverability challenges are weakening

publishers' capacity to invest in new Australian works, culturally significant books, literary journals, and locally owned intellectual property.

The next National Cultural Policy should strengthen the funding, institutions, rights frameworks and public programs that enable Australian books to be created, published, discovered and read. The Australian Government should:

- create a stand-alone **Australian Book Fund** for new Australian works, culturally significant publishing and locally owned intellectual property;
- extend creative industries tax offsets or equivalent incentives to book publishers;
- build the data, metadata, rights, supply-chain and market-development infrastructure that helps Australian books reach readers and markets;
- launch a dedicated **Books Australia** program, modelled on Sounds Australia, to drive rights sales, export promotion, translation, market development and cultural diplomacy;
- fund accessible publishing, inclusive formats and discoverability for readers with print disability and other access needs.

This would strengthen the publishing systems that carry Australian stories, knowledge and ideas to readers: supporting investment, discoverability, access, export opportunities and the visibility of Australian books.

### ***Pillar 3: Centrality of the Artist: Support authors and copyright***

For books, centrality of the artist means supporting authors and illustrators and protecting the copyright that sustains their work.

#### **Support for Authors**

Australian authors and illustrators create works that shape national life, yet many lack the time, income security and fair payment needed to sustain creative careers. Without stronger support, Australia risks losing emerging and mid-career writers and illustrators, narrowing the range of books available to readers and weakening the future of Australian writing.

The Australian Government should:

- increase Lending Rights as a core mechanism of author and publisher remuneration;
- establish Commonwealth multi-year fellowships for mid-career writers, and seed money for emerging creators;
- improve tax and income settings for creative workers, including introducing tax-free prizes and grants;

- support paid author and illustrator appearances in schools, festivals, libraries and bookshops, including in regional, rural and remote communities;
- make public funding contingent on fair pay, including payment at or above ASA minimum rates.

Together, these measures would strengthen the economic foundations of authorship and illustration. They recognise creative labour, improve remuneration, support career development and maintain broad public access to books through libraries, schools, festivals and community programs.

## **Protect Copyright**

Copyright is fundamental to the book sector. It enables authors and illustrators to control and earn income from their work, publishers to invest in Australian writing, research, education and culture, and libraries, educators and readers to access Australian books and knowledge through trusted systems.

The rapid development of generative AI means the next National Cultural Policy should treat AI and copyright as core cultural policy issues by establishing a fair, transparent and rights-respecting framework that:

- protects authors, illustrators, publishers, libraries, educators and readers from unregulated or extractive AI practices through copyright settings based on consent, licensing and fair payment;
- mandates transparency about training data, content provenance and AI-generated outputs;
- respects Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultural and data sovereignty, including free, prior and informed consent for the use of First Nations cultural materials;
- supports lawful access, preservation, literacy, research and education through trusted digital systems;
- enables workable copyright enforcement in digital and AI-enabled environments; and
- commissions national research into generative AI's impacts on authors, publishers, libraries, educators, researchers, readers and the wider creative industries.

This would support rights-respecting AI development while protecting creator income, lawful access, cultural sovereignty, reader trust, educational quality, research integrity and Australian content visibility.

## ***Pillar 4: Strong Cultural Infrastructure: Strengthen infrastructure: Writing Australia, libraries, bookshops, discovery, and literary life***

A sustainable culture of books and reading depends on connected infrastructure: the institutions, places, systems and skills that support writing, publishing, distribution, discovery, access, criticism, education and public engagement. Yet this infrastructure — including bookshops, libraries, schools, universities, publishers, writers' centres, festivals, journals, review publications and literary organisations — remains underfunded, uneven and vulnerable to rising costs, service gaps and fragmented policy responsibility. The next National Cultural Policy should treat it as a national system requiring coordinated investment, stronger institutions and long-term policy responsibility. Writing Australia is the institutional anchor for this system, but it needs sufficient scale to inform policy, fund sector development and coordinate literary infrastructure.

### **Resource Writing Australia and sustain literary life**

Writing Australia is one of *Revive's* most important achievements for books and reading, but its funding does not yet match the scale of its national role. It should be strengthened as the national literature agency and as a key policy, development and funding body for books, reading and literary culture.

The Australian Government should increase funding for Writing Australia so it can meet urgent unmet priorities in the literary ecosystem, including:

- writers' centres, development organisations and service bodies supporting writers across their careers, particularly emerging writers;
- literary festivals, public events, journals, little magazines and review publications;
- children's literature, reading and literacy organisations;
- paid author appearances, professional development, mentorships, residencies, and fellowships.

Writing Australia should also be resourced to provide sector development, coordination and policy advice, supported by expert industry input. Given the scale and importance of written culture to creativity, education, research, civic health and national identity, this should include working with sector organisations, governments and other stakeholders on a National Plan for Books and Reading, and leading research, consultation and policy development on issues affecting books, reading and written culture, including:

- classification arrangements;
- arts and humanities discipline settings, including Job-ready Graduates fees;

- university partnerships that support literary research and criticism; and
- the role of books and written culture in sustaining trusted knowledge, critical inquiry, informed public debate and shared civic life.

At the same time, Writing Australia should not be expected to carry the full cost of national books-and-reading policy from its existing budget. Larger national investment, infrastructure and access measures should receive dedicated funding through the National Plan for Books and Reading, including:

- an Australian Book Fund;
- national reading investment;
- book data, metadata and digital infrastructure;
- accessibility measures;
- Books Australia, as an agency for export promotion, rights and translation support;
- bookshop and library infrastructure measures.

This approach would clarify Writing Australia's role, strengthen its capacity to support literary organisations and programs, and ensure larger national measures are funded separately through the National Plan for Books and Reading.

### **Improve book data and discoverability**

The book sector needs stronger data and metadata infrastructure. Current gaps in shared data, metadata quality and interoperability make it hard for readers to discover Australian books and hard for the government to understand the sector's scale, contribution and needs.

Partnering with industry, universities and libraries to improve data and metadata would support:

- discovery and promotion of the full diversity of Australian-authored books, including works by First Nations authors;
- supply-chain efficiency, export and rights opportunities;
- tracking of buying, borrowing, reading and discovery patterns;
- stronger evidence, sector data and benchmarks for policy and investment decisions.

This infrastructure would help readers find Australian books and give governments, industry, researchers and the public a stronger evidence base for understanding the sector, improving policy and investment, and elevating national conversations about books and reading.

## **Recognise bookshops as cultural infrastructure**

Australian bookshops are cultural institutions and small businesses. They connect readers with books, promote Australian authors, host events, sustain public spaces for literary culture, and support local economies.

Bookshops face rising costs, fragile margins and global online competition. Without policy support, more communities will lose local bookshops and the cultural spaces, skilled curation, author pathways and Australian-title discovery they provide.

The Australian Government should:

- recognise Australian independent bookshops as cultural infrastructure through creative industry tax offsets or equivalent support for occupancy, labour and technology costs, including leases, wages, rates, capital expenditure and digital capability;
- support bookshops as cultural venues and delivery partners for reading, author, community and book-access initiatives;
- invest in digital and supply-chain capability;
- support a national bookseller training, professional development and certification program.

Because bookshops deliver cultural, reading and Australian-title discovery outcomes beyond retail, they should be treated as cultural infrastructure and included in national reading, audience development and cultural participation policy.

## **Upgrade public libraries and school library standards**

Public and school libraries are essential reading infrastructure. Public libraries provide equitable community access to books, digital resources, collections and programs, while school libraries build reading cultures, information literacy and lifelong engagement with books. Yet access to well-resourced libraries remains uneven, particularly across regional, rural and remote communities.

The Australian Government should:

- support better-resourced public and school libraries and library workforces, addressing inequities between metropolitan, regional, rural and remote communities;
- conduct a national audit of school library provision and resourcing, and use the results to establish a national school library framework, with a commitment to a library in every school staffed by qualified

teacher-librarians, with adequate collection funding, accessible resources, and strong representation of Australian-authored books;

- expand print, audio, and digital collections, with strong representation of contemporary Australian-authored books, including First Nations titles;
- support print, media and information literacy programs;
- ensure catalogues, websites and digital resources are accessible.

Libraries should be treated as national reading infrastructure, with every child able to access a well-resourced school library, contemporary books and qualified library support.

### ***Pillar 5: Engaging the Audience: Build a reading nation***

A creative, informed, resilient and democratic country depends on a strong culture of reading. Yet participation is falling and becoming more unequal, with barriers including cost, access, confidence, time, disability, digital distraction, weak reading cultures and difficulty discovering relevant books.

The next National Cultural Policy should invest in a reading nation. Reading is not only a literacy issue: it is a cultural practice, and reading for pleasure should be a national cultural policy priority.

The Australian Government should:

- fund targeted reading-for-pleasure campaigns for adults, children, young people and families;
- equip schools and families to build strong reading cultures;
- strengthen public and school libraries as places to discover, access and participate in Australian books;
- improve access for communities with low reading participation, people with print disability and other access barriers;
- fund a national book voucher program, or include books and local bookshops in any broader youth cultural voucher scheme;
- support author touring, book clubs, paid events, story times, workshops and other bookshop, library and school-based programs;
- promote Australian books, First Nations creators and diverse Australian writing; and
- strengthen the evidence base for reading policy.

Schools, libraries, bookshops, festivals, digital catalogues and local organisations should be supported as pathways for readers to discover Australian stories, ideas, knowledge and voices.

## Closing: A national plan for books and reading

Australia now needs a dedicated National Plan for Books and Reading, aligned with the Government's proposed pillars, to support First Nations cultural authority, Australian stories and knowledge, creators' careers, book-sector infrastructure and national reading participation.

This submission is made by Books Create Australia and supported by the organisations listed below. We would welcome the opportunity to work with the Government on its design and implementation.

### *Books Create Australia member organisations*



#### **Australian Booksellers Association**



#### **Australian Library and Information Association**



#### **Australian Publishers Association**



#### **Australian Society of Authors**



## Australia Reads

*Allied literary, publishing, reading and accessibility organisations supporting this submission*

**AustLit**

**Australian Book Review**

**Australian Literary Agents Association**

**Byron Writers Festival**

**Children's Book Council of Australia**

**Independent Publishers Network  
Australia**

**The Literature Centre, WA**

**NT Writers' Centre**

**Queensland Writers Centre**

**Round Table on Information Access for  
People with Print Disabilities**

**Sydney Review of Books**

**The Wheeler Centre**

**WestWords**

**Writers SA**

**Writing NSW**

**Writing WA**

### **Further Information:**

Dr Stuart Glover, Convenor, Books Create Australia, C/- APA, 60/89 Jones St, Ultimo NSW 2007

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