

Dear Minister Burke,

I am writing as a bookseller to urge the government to include meaningful support for local bookshops in the new National Cultural Policy.

Our bookshop, Gertrude and Alice Café Bookstore has operated in Bondi Beach since 2001. We are a community space open 364 days a year, 12 hours a day, 7 days a week to service our neighbourhood.

Over the 25 years that we have been here, we have watched friendships blossom, children grow, and lovers meet (plus a couple engagements and a wedding!). We have been a space that people call home, somewhere they come to tell good news or bad – a place that offers comfort and the kind of familiarity that grows rarer every year in Bondi. There are people who have been coming here since they were born, who've grown up between our shelves, worked with us through high school, and who will – we hope – one day bring their own children here too.

Post-Lockdowns, when feelings of isolation were at their highest, community events like book clubs, book launches and author talks became very important – both to our business and to our customers. Our in-house book club, The Bondi Literary Salon, hosts 7 book clubs a month across different genres of Fiction & Non-Fiction. Members of the book club (whom all live locally) take turns hosting 35 people in the store. We have over 2000 members now and interest continues to grow as more people seek connection and community through literature. We would love to eventually reach more people by putting our Book Clubs online and mailing the book selection to readers around Australia.

We host over 250 events per year. More than half of those are held in-store, but we do also hire alternative venues for larger events. We have 2 bookings for a 400-seat venue later this year. We are also working closely with Waverley Council and the Bondi Pavilion to host the very first *Bondi Writers Festival*, which will be held on 19-

22nd November, 2026. This year's theme is **Resilience Reflection Reciprocity** – it is our plan to honour that it will be one year since the Bondi massacre on December 14 in some important way.

We are lucky to have the support of many local Australian Authors who live in the Eastern Suburbs who regularly call in to sign books and collaborate on projects when needed. The most notable Author is Markus Zusak who wrote *The Book Thief*. Published in 2005, *The Book Thief* became an international bestseller and was translated into 63 languages and sold 17 million copies. It was adapted into a feature film and is now a musical as well. We accommodate overseas postage for Mr. Zusak's books as many Australian booksellers do not offer this option. Our authors know that indie bookstores are the cornerstone of the book industry, we provide something that cannot be replaced by department stores or the internet: real connection, real conversation, and the inexplicable magic of a place dedicated to stories.

We are a family-owned business and both of my adult children work alongside me. We employ 20 staff, many of them stay with us for years – some even decades. Our former staff visit regularly, sometimes they publish a book and it ends up on our shelves, sometimes they host a book club or work a shift when we need them. The bonds forged in a book shop last a lifetime.

The Australian Book Industry has faced many challenges in the last 2 decades. Ones that, unless change is made, independent stores will not recover from in the long term. We need help. It is an unprotected industry and one that needs government focus, assistance and support to remain viable.

Every year more bookshops close, undermined by online giants and discount chains that sell books at 40–50% below recommended retail price. Every day we are asked to price match the giants of Amazon and other major Discount Department Stores (DDS).

Australia lags behind comparable countries in protecting its book retail sector. France, Italy, the UK, Germany, The Netherlands and more have introduced proven measures - discount caps, tax offsets,

and rates relief - that have stabilised their independent bookshop sectors. Australia should do the same. We just hosted an Exchange Bookseller from Paagman Books who have a thriving book industry and has been owned by the same family generations for 95 years. We took her to visit Big W and Target and she was mortified about a new-release book can be available elsewhere at 40-50% off RRP on the day of publication. She actually said to us “How are you still here?” The DDS stores in The Netherlands don’t even sell books as the price cap restricts them from using books as loss leaders.

Books are different to film and music; they require absolute attention, commitment and patience. You cannot have a casual relationship with a book you love – and thus the connections formed through books are unique and meaningful. In a world that feels lonely to so many people, at a time when attention spans are shrinking, there has never been a greater urgency to support bricks & mortar book stores.

I support the Australian Booksellers Association's call to:

- Fund establishment of a skills training and certification program development and delivery to professionalise the industry, creating recognised career pathways.
- Establish an Australian Independent Bookshop Tax Offset (AIBTO): a refundable tax rebate on core operating expenses including wages, rent, and purchases of Australian-authored titles.
- Examine the feasibility of restrictions on deep discounting of new-release Australian titles, aligned with established European models.
- Investigate the case for GST reduction or exemption on books, consistent with international precedent.
- Invest in refreshing legacy data systems across the Australian book supply chain.
- Support an Australian Book Voucher Program, redeemable at local bookshops nationwide.
- Fund ongoing grants to support bookshop event delivery including author events, book clubs, workshops, story times, and other community programs.

I urge the government to act.

Local bookshops are irreplaceable, but without support more will close. The measures proposed by the ABA are modest, internationally proven, and would deliver significant cultural and economic returns.

Yours sincerely,

Co-owners Jane Turner, Jordan Turner and Kate Turner.

Gertrude & Alice Café Bookstore

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]