

ISLAND

24 May 2026

Submission to the National Cultural Policy, 2026

Island is a Lutruwita/Tasmania-based literary organisation that has been operating since 1979. In 2025, across its print magazine and Island Online, Island published and paid 151 Australian writers and graphic artists.

In the past two years, Island has expanded beyond publishing to provide services for writers, including craft workshops, panels and mentorship. In late May 2026, Island will present the first Island Readers & Writers Festival in Nipaluna/Hobart, featuring sixty artists appearing over five days.

Island prioritises paying writers. Our publication pay rates are among the best in Australia. For our festival, every artist appearing is being paid the ASA rate, where an appropriate one exists, plus superannuation. We are proud that we provide a professional, sensitive and supportive experience of editing, contracting and payment for writers and other artists.

Island is currently supported by multi-year funding from both Creative Australia and Arts Tasmania, as well as project funding from the Copyright Agency Cultural Fund. The Readers and Writers Festival is largely funded by Arts Tasmania. It is support from government that allows us to pay writers fairly and provide them with a publishing and public engagement platform.

Our work falls across all five pillars of the National Cultural Policy, and our experience has been that the challenges for a literary organisation are not easily put into one or more of these categories but are woven through them and influenced by the broader cultural and political landscape.

In 2022 we raised the issue of insufficient funding for literary magazines generally. This is still an issue. Why does Australia need literary magazines? Because they give writers the opportunity to:

- create new works that tell diverse stories and contribute to Australian arts and culture
- experiment and take risks to extend the boundaries of creative practice through new or hybrid literary forms (without the pressure to conform to 'commercially viable' genres, a pressure that has intensified since 2022 with the narrowing of Australian publishing generally)
- reach national and international audiences (via print and online publishing), including gaining attention from publishers, literary agents and writers' festivals

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- publish work that may otherwise be hard to place
- gain remuneration from author payments and/or prize money (which often facilitates 'more time to write')
- build portfolios, experience, credibility and confidence – all of which are of great importance to new and emerging writers
- gain career and skill development through the experience of working with professional editors and designers
- engage in innovative, collaborative cross-sector projects that connect writers with other art forms and cultural organisations.

As such, literary magazines form an enabling infrastructure for a vibrant literary sector in which:

- new talent is spotted and careers are nurtured
- new and emerging writers can 'try out their voice'
- new ideas and forms can be tested, driving innovation
- longer works can be initiated and incubated
- funds can be leveraged from philanthropy and grants to filter through to a wide range of deserving writers and highly skilled arts workers (such as editors, designers and arts administrators) who may not be eligible for individual grants.

For each print issue of Island across fiction, non-fiction and poetry, we receive upward of 550 submissions from hopeful writers. We publish on average 22. There is a huge unmet demand for publication among Australian writers, and not just emerging writers, but established, popular writers who also struggle for publication opportunities.

Australia's writing ecosystem needs more literary magazines offering paid publication: we recommend more investment in existing literary magazines and more support for new magazines. Supporting writers to write is wonderful, but they also need places to publish their work.

In previous submissions, the majority of our recommendations have addressed funding shortfalls. While lack of funding is still a pressing issue for literary organisations, a broader societal issue has emerged over the past three years. The phrase 'existential threat' is horribly overused, but this is what creative writers in Australia are facing. Sources of writing income are disappearing as Australian independent book publishers are closing or being eaten up by multinationals, magazines are folding, festivals are imploding. The vast majority of creative writers earn a living primarily through other sources, but these have also been eaten away: tutoring work at universities has dried up thanks to the Job-ready Graduates program undermining Arts courses; work in communications has severely diminished as AI takes over these jobs. With tech companies stealing writers' work to train AI that is now replacing writers, it is unsurprising that morale among Australian writers is profoundly low. This spills over to literary organisations: Island's Editorial Manager, Fiction Editor,

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Non-fiction Editor, Poetry Editor and Production Manager are all working writers as well as arts workers, and we are all working every day with writers who feel their vocation no longer holds value, financial or cultural, in wider Australian society. Publishers and festival programmers are dealing with an undercurrent of fear about whether their artistic choices will lead to their defunding or closure.

Island is currently in a relatively comfortable financial position thanks to the funding mentioned above. However, as in all arts organisations, our program relies heavily on arts workers prepared to put in substantial volunteer hours to ensure our services and outputs are of the highest possible standard. Writers, of course, spend far more time creating work than they are remunerated for. In a context where creative writing is seen as valuable to the broader culture, where it is appreciated and supported, this feels like a bearable burden. When it feels like the work you do is being undermined on all sides, it does not. Therefore, we call for a National Cultural policy that:

- in the case of AI, stands firmly on the side of writers, protecting their work from multinational tech companies
- removes the current financial barriers to studying an Arts degree
- supports writers' freedom of speech and bravely supports publishers and festivals to promote a complex diversity of opinions. Literary magazines expose readers to diverse literature – they can contemplate ideas, genres, styles and writers they might not otherwise seek out, or may have actively dismissed – and we hope that a future National Cultural Policy will support this positive contribution to plurality and the richness of our society.

We applaud the formation of Creative Workplaces and its emphasis on fairer working conditions in the arts. Burnout is a significant issue in the industry and it is good to see the first steps in addressing workplace issues. We recommend continued investment in this area to create a more sustainable sector.

We also applaud the formation of Writing Australia; in its early stages, it shows great promise. We appreciate the opportunity to comment on the next stage of the National Cultural Policy and look forward to seeing its outcome.