

Submission on the development of Australia's new National Cultural Policy, ensuring it embodies the diversity and aspirations of our nation.

Background

This submission is written by Steven Reynolds [REDACTED]

[REDACTED] Since publication, [REDACTED] have learned a great deal about the civic value of independent bookstores and the challenges they face. They are essential to the promotion and establishment of new Australian voices, and we believe they should be considered in the formulation of a new National Cultural Policy.

Submission (500 words)

Independent bookstores are an essential part of Australia's cultural infrastructure and should be explicitly recognised and supported within the new National Cultural Policy.

Much discussion of cultural policy focuses, understandably, on artists, major institutions, festivals, libraries and performing arts organisations. But independent bookstores occupy a unique and often overlooked position within Australia's cultural ecosystem. They are not simply retail businesses. They are community cultural spaces, literary advocates, informal educators, and meeting places where Australian stories are discovered, discussed, and sustained.

Independent bookstores play a critical role in supporting Australian writers, particularly emerging authors. In a market increasingly dominated by global algorithms and international bestsellers, independent booksellers actively champion Australian voices through curated recommendations, staff expertise, and local promotion. Many Australian writers build their readership through the advocacy of independent bookstores. Without them, many Australian stories would struggle to reach audiences at all.

Independent bookstores create cultural participation at a grassroots level. Across Australia, independent bookstores host author talks, book clubs, and literary discussions that support civic connection. Many run dozens of events each year with limited resources and zero government support. In an era of increasing social fragmentation and digital isolation, these physical gathering places matter enormously.

Independent bookstores also help sustain local cultural identity. They reflect the character of their communities and create spaces where people can encounter Australian literature, ideas and debate in person with their local community. They connect readers not only with books, but with one another. They are among the few remaining public spaces centred on reflection, conversation and imagination rather than consumption alone.

Australia already recognises the importance of cultural infrastructure such as libraries, galleries and performing arts venues. Independent bookstores deserve recognition in the same way: as vital cultural institutions contributing to literacy, social cohesion, public discourse and national identity. The new National Cultural Policy should therefore include targeted support for independent bookstores through grants, touring support for author events, and partnerships with schools and libraries. Policies supporting Australian writers and their work cannot stop at publication; they must also support the community spaces that connect writers with readers.

Furthermore, new paperback fiction in Australia is typically priced at \$35, which can create a barrier for readers already facing cost-of-living pressures who may be unwilling to risk their

purchase on a new voice. Government could explore partnership models with Australian publishers and independent bookstores to subsidise the retail price of new Australian fiction, for example, bringing the price closer to \$25 when purchased through independent bookstores, allowing them to match volume sellers such as Big W, Kmart and Amazon AU. Such a program would support three outcomes simultaneously: increasing readership of Australian literature, supporting local authors early in their careers, and strengthening independent bookstores as cultural institutions within their communities. Importantly, directing such support through independent bookstores encourage readers into local cultural spaces where Australian writers are actively championed.

If Australia wants a vibrant literary culture, strong reading communities, and a future for Australian stories, independent bookstores must be part of that vision.