

Office for the Arts
Department of Infrastructure, Transport,
Regional Development, Communications and the Arts
GPO Box 594 | CANBERRA ACT 2601

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24 May 2026

To the Office for the Arts,

I am writing as a mid-career poet and debut creative nonfiction writer based in Victoria. I am grateful for the literature-related initiatives introduced in *Revive*, including the establishment of Writing Australia and the Poet Laureate position.

Improved funding models for individual creators and strong innovative support for the literary ecosystem are both needed now – without delay. One without the other will fail: writers will continue to struggle to create, or they will continue to struggle to be published, found, read or heard. For this reason, I wholeheartedly support Books Create Australia's call for *A National Plan for Books and Reading*.

Individual creators urgently need more help to sustain their practice today and into the future. This was very clear in the 2022 National Cultural Policy consultation submissions. The advent of generative AI in 2022, the continued diminution of book reviews and the rising cost of printing books, among many other factors, have made the outlook for literary writers and their publishers even worse today than it was in 2022.

Support the success of mid-career writers

My comments here relate to the *Revive* pillar "Centrality of the artist". **Specifically, severe challenges are faced by mid-career writers. These challenges are particularly acute for poets**, who were found to earn less than \$5,700 annually from their writing on average in the 2022 National Survey of Australian Book Authors. The median is undoubtedly far less. This demeaning and untenable financial situation reduces the lifelong cultural work of dedicated poets to the status of a hobby. It is exacerbated by the scarcity of secure university-based creative writing positions for poets wishing to pass on their craft. Positions like these were a lifeline for poets in the past.

The Australian Society of Authors has highlighted the need for 'Multi-year fellowships supporting mid-career authors by providing them with time to write.' As a mid-career, mid-life writer with financial dependents, I completely

concur. Very few substantial fellowships exist for writers, and the timing of fellowships often doesn't coincide with the realities and timing of the writing process (e.g. the intended work must be a second book, or start after a certain time, or it must already be under contract).

Writing a book of poetry takes hundreds, if not thousands, of hours of dedicated unpaid work. Writing a nonfiction book, particularly highly researched books, takes months or years. **Many writers at the mid-career stage, and especially with substantial mid-life caring and financial commitments, simply cannot afford to take this amount of time off without some form of support**, whether from their families (if available) or grants (of any kind). When creative work must be spread across many years of weekends and periods of leave from paid work, and in-between caring responsibilities (which are particularly acute for primary carers), a single book can take years to complete. This severely limits creative career progression and opportunities, especially for primary carers and those supporting families.

Mid-career is the point in life at which a writer either goes on to establish their name through a substantial body of work or falls away. For writers who have committed much of their own time and money to their creative development, facing a mid-life funding cliff and inability to devote the time they need to consolidate their body of work is simply devastating. Children growing up with a writing parent are also exposed to a model of struggle which can hardly inspire them to follow the same path.

Remove the competition for scarce funding between established, mid-career and emerging writers through dedicated funding pools

Mid-career writers in the 'sandwich generation' often have mortgages, children's education to support, and aging parents. Yet they are often asked to compete directly with both emerging and more established writers for the scarce grant funds that exist. This should not be the case: **each career and life-stage is very different and writers in each should have dedicated funding pools to support their specific needs and to enable their success. Career stage should also not be measured in years but in outputs**, to support better equity between writers with different levels of financial support and opportunity to write.

Remove tax from literary prizes and grants

I strongly support the Australian Society of Author's call for tax-free literary prizes and grants. **The total dollars gathered in tax from grants and prizes is exceedingly small, but the impact on creatives of having to return up to a third of their winnings or their grant money is substantial.** Having to calculate the

impact of tax also makes it much more complex for writers to project the amount of grant money needed to support a literary project.

Acknowledge the experience of arts beyond story

Regarding the second pillar, “A Place for Every Story” (‘Australian stories are seen and heard, regardless of platform’), **the situation of poets is arguably not helped by the framing of literature and the arts in general as ‘stories’. Not all literature is storytelling, nor should it be.** Lyric poetry is better understood as an experiential art, which may or may not have a narrative element. (The same goes for music and the visual arts – and all other artforms or platforms.) “Stories and experiences” could better capture the range of modes of engagement in the arts, especially literature. “Story” alone is too reductive of what the arts can be and do.

Fund inter-arts and multi-arts projects involving contemporary Australian poets and poetry

Novel funding models that encourage inter-arts and multi-arts projects which include poets could help to boost poets’ extremely limited opportunities for earnings and visibility, expanding the audience and the market for poets’ work by exposing a wider arts audience to contemporary poets’ work. For example, some grants for new music compositions could include a requirement to source the lyrics from living Australian poets. Visual arts grants could encourage the inclusion of accompanying texts by contemporary poets.

Remove generative AI from the submissions process for cultural policy consultations

Finally, I wish to express my disappointment at learning that generative AI will be used in processing these submissions. **Generative AI has added to the general sense of devastation among many writers because of its foundation in stolen creative work.** Mid-career writers are particularly affected by this devastation, as they juggle other mid-life challenges with the uncertainty of being able to find the time and the means to consolidate their work in the face of additional pressures from AI. Some submissions to the National Cultural Policy will also undoubtedly include sensitive creative life-related details. These should not be subject to ingestion by AI. I hope and trust that human readers will play a substantial role in making sense of the findings from this consultation process.

Yours sincerely,
Dr Judith Bishop