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From: MARION
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MARION Submission to the National Cultural Policy Consultation

MARION welcomes the opportunity to contribute to the development of Australia's next National Cultural Policy.

As the peak organisation for writers and writing based culture in the ACT region, MARION supports writers through professional development programs, mentorships, fellowships, workshops, public events and literary awards. Our work extends across the ACT and surrounding region and engages writers at many different stages of their creative lives. Some are taking their first steps as writers. Others are developing manuscripts, preparing work for publication or sustaining long-term creative practices.

1: Literature as a cultural practice

Writing is one of the most accessible and widely practised artforms in Australia. Whether through reading, storytelling, education, creative practice, community participation or public discourse, writing shapes how we communicate, learn, reflect and connect with one another.

People come to writing for many reasons: to tell stories, understand themselves, preserve histories, connect with others, imagine alternatives or make sense of the world around them. While publication is an important outcome for some writers, it is only one part of a much broader literary ecology.

Literature contributes to creativity, wellbeing, and critical thinking, all while cultivating cultural participation and nurturing community connection. It helps individuals understand themselves and others, engage with ideas, and make sense of the world around them.

These outcomes are not always easily measured, but they are fundamental to a healthy and connected society.

2: Supporting writers beyond publication

Across our programs we see the value of writing every day. Through initiatives such as Hidden Nerve, Between the Lines, our mentorship program and community writing

opportunities, we work with writers seeking to develop their craft, deepen their practice and connect with literary peers.

Some of the most important outcomes we witness occur long before publication. They happen when a writer gains confidence in their voice, receives meaningful feedback, finds a creative community or begins to see themselves as someone whose stories matter. Publication may be a goal for some participants, but it is not the sole measure of success.

In our experience, literary development rarely follows a neat or predictable path.

The impact of a workshop, mentorship, fellowship or professional development opportunity may not become visible for years. The relationship between a creative opportunity today and a published work many years later is rarely linear, yet these experiences often form the foundation upon which creative practice is built.

Success in literature is often measured through publication, awards or sales. While these outcomes are important, they only tell part of the story. It is important that cultural policy should recognise the value of literary development, experimentation, learning and participation alongside traditional publishing outcomes.

3: Participation and access

Many of the barriers writers report encountering are not creative. They instead relate to time, cost, geography and access. Writers frequently balance creative practice alongside employment, caring responsibilities and increasing financial pressures. For emerging writers, these challenges can make participation in professional development opportunities difficult at precisely the stage when support is most valuable.

Through programs such as First Draft, delivered in partnership with schools and regional communities, we have seen the transformative role creative expression can play for young people, not only as a pathway into literature but as a means of building confidence, connection and self-expression. Similar outcomes can be seen across literary development programs more broadly, where access to creative opportunities helps people build skills, confidence and a sense of belonging within literary communities.

The writers most at risk of being excluded from literary practice are often those already facing barriers such as those relating to geography, disability, income, caring responsibilities or cultural exclusion. We have observed that the writers who would benefit most from mentorship, professional development and being part of creative communities are frequently those least able to afford them. Supporting these writers requires sustained investment in the organisations and programs that provide ongoing pathways for participation, development and creative growth.

MARION's membership extends beyond the ACT into neighbouring parts of New South Wales, reflecting the reality that literary communities do not always align neatly with

administrative boundaries. As an organisation working across the ACT and surrounding region, we are particularly conscious that access to literary opportunities is not evenly distributed. Although the ACT is often perceived as a well-serviced cultural environment, many writers in surrounding regional communities continue to face barriers relating to distance, cost and access to professional development opportunities. In addition, the region has a smaller number of opportunities for individuals and organisations to attract funding, being a small city without councils.

Flexible delivery models and locally responsive programs are essential to ensuring more people can participate in Australia's literary life regardless of where they live.

4: Literary organisations as cultural infrastructure

Literary organisations play an important role within Australia's cultural infrastructure. They connect writers with opportunities, audiences and one another. They create spaces for experimentation, learning and exchange. They support emerging voices, foster artistic excellence and contribute to cultural participation at local, regional and national levels.

The developmental work undertaken by literary organisations is often less visible than outcomes such as publication, but it remains essential. Writers require opportunities to learn, test ideas, connect with peers and build sustainable creative practices over time. These opportunities rarely emerge without investment, coordination and dedicated organisations to support them.

Yet many literary organisations operate with limited resources and short funding horizons despite delivering significant public value. Greater investment in organisational sustainability would strengthen outcomes for writers, readers and communities alike. Stable organisations are better placed to provide consistent opportunities, maintain partnerships, support workforce development and respond to changing community needs.

5: First Nations leadership and self-determination

MARION recognises the importance of First Nations leadership and self-determination within the literary sector.

Through our work with organisations such as Us Mob Writing, and with individual First Nations writers and creators, we have seen the value of community-led approaches that create opportunities for First Nations storytellers to share knowledge, strengthen creative practice and engage with broader literary communities while maintaining cultural authority.

We support continued investment in First Nations-led literary activity, culturally informed practice and opportunities for First Nations writers to participate in and shape Australia's literary future on their own terms.

6: Fair remuneration and workforce sustainability

The sustainability of literary culture depends upon fair remuneration. MARION maintains a commitment to paying Australian Society of Authors recommended rates wherever possible because we believe writers, mentors, facilitators and other literary workers should be appropriately valued for their expertise and labour.

Cultural policy should support organisations to maintain fair payment standards and recognise the true costs of delivering high-quality literary programs and services. Organisations committed to paying industry-standard rates should not be disadvantaged by funding settings that fail to account for the real cost of creative labour.

Equally, fair pay and secure conditions should extend to arts workers, many of whom are artists themselves. The arts sector remains heavily reliant on part-time and casual employment, creating instability for workers and organisations alike.

As cost-of-living pressures continue to grow, the long-term sustainability of the sector depends upon investment in the people who deliver, coordinate and support creative activity. Full-time and secure employment opportunities should not be the exception within the cultural sector.

7: Looking ahead

We encourage the Australian Government to recognise literature not only as an industry, but as a cultural practice that contributes to creativity, wellbeing, critical thinking, community connection and public life.

Publication is one valuable outcome of literary practice, but it is not the only one. A healthy literary culture depends upon people having access to a multiplicity of outcomes including opportunities to experiment, learn, connect and develop over time. This depends upon organisations having the capacity to nurture those opportunities, for the widest possible cross-section of people, often over many years.

MARION calls for:

- Increased coordination between federal and state funding bodies to ensure writers from all states and territories have access to a range of opportunities to create, develop and share their work
- Greater national investment in independent writers and small to medium arts organisations based in Canberra (outside of the National Institutions)
- The payment of ASA rates for all funded projects
- Multi-year fellowships for mid-career writers
- The development of specific supports for emerging writers
- Solutions to the unprecedented theft of Australian artists' work by multinational tech companies operating within Australia

- Tax reform that supports income generation for writers, including tax-free prizes and grants, and a tax-free threshold
- Commitment to educational interventions that support Australian writers and the development of young people as readers and writers

We urge the Australian Government to consider submissions made by all facets of the literary community, from individual writers working across genre and form, to the organisations and industry bodies that support them, through to the publishers, journals and festivals that platform and distribute literary work. The sector requires support at all levels to ensure that Australian stories continue to be created, shared and valued for generations to come.

8: Conclusion

We are a diverse nation with many voices, perspectives and lived experiences. Cultural policy should help ensure that access to writing as an artform is not determined by geography, income or privilege, but remains open to all who wish to participate. Our future stories will emerge because writers are supported to develop their practice, communities are able to participate in cultural life, and the organisations that sustain literary culture are recognised as an essential part of Australia's creative infrastructure.

Kind regards,



Katy Mutton, CEO and Artistic Director

On behalf of the staff, Board and members of MARION

24 May, 2026