

**This submission responds to the National Cultural Policy consultation
24th May 2026**

My background:

I have been a published author, writer and radio-maker for over 40 years. My work has been used in many contexts — by readers, listeners, teachers, university lecturers, and by those creating policy decisions on a range of topics.

The kind of writing I do is extremely labour intensive, and while there are times I have been paid what are considered high rates per word for my work (eg in newspapers, or via short-term grants), most of my writing work involves little or sometimes no pay at all.

Furthermore, paid opportunities for writers are decreasing as the legacy media declines, universities become constrained by funding cuts, readerships are fragmented, and many of the comms jobs that many writers used to fund their arts practice are disappearing due to new technologies. These paid opportunities enabled many of us to also devote some of our time to works of cultural (but not commercial) significance.

As these paid options are disappearing, it is so important that funding and subsidies be increased.

As such I support the following :

—**More funding for individual artists** through well funded bodies and arms length peer-reviewed boards

—**A Basic Income scheme for artists and writers** — as trialled successfully in Ireland.

—**Increased funding of libraries and educational institutions, and of the copyright council** so more funds can be distributed to writers this way for the varied use of their work, and more payment for writers to do talks in schools and libraries and as guest lecturers at universities.

—**Specific funding and policy direction for ABC Radio to return to earlier models of programming where they paid freelancers** for scripted work and the performance of their work. And had more variety in the kinds of books that were discussed (at the moment it is pretty much only novels.)

This was an incredibly valuable and cost-effective way to get work that is incredibly labour intensive and/or deeply researched and carefully written, and socially enriching, to a wider audience.

As one example — my poetry memoir *Vagabondage*, published by UWAP, sold around 600 copies, which is above average for a poetry book in Australia. But one long piece from that book was produced as an 8min performance of the work, with scripted sounds effects. Each broadcast of that piece reached at least 50K people, and it was repeated about five times, and was nominated by a US aggregator website as a Best of the Web item for the month it first aired. So it was also downloaded via their website. It is still available on the ABC-RN website and continues to reach new audiences. Eg last month I shared it for Mother's Day from my Substack. I often get feedback from listeners about this piece.

So instead of this piece only reaching 600 people via direct book sales, it has reached in excess of 300,000 people, and people from all around the world.

However, there is now nowhere on ABC-RN for this kind of work to be produced and aired.

This one change — returning to the paid use of the work of writers, and funding the ABC to be able to do this, and fulfilling this part of its charter — would make a tremendous difference to how unusual and provocative work is accessed in Australia. Especially as this can reach every part of Australia, whereas books like this, even when available in bookshops, are usually only available in a few inner city bookshops.

—Immediate priority of developing sophisticated policy to address the exponential rise of AI technology and the potential for enormous damage to the cultural ecosystem.

—More reliable and consistent funding for a diverse range of Literary and cultural journals. These are so important for seeding new work and developing new generations of writers. As a writer from a working class background, I probably would not have had the confidence or felt entitled to keep writing without early publication in literary magazines.

—Investment in First-Nations led writing, mentoring, publishing and public engagement through writers in schools and universities programs.

—Tax reform to support authors — including tax-free literary prizes and grants. It is absurd that winnings on gambling is tax free but authors who depend on the occasional major prize or grant to supplement years of hand-to-mouth income often lose half of it in tax.

I know at several writers who have only been able to buy a house (in the country, and still with a mortgage) because they won a number of prizes for one of their books — after years and years of low paid contribution. Having secure housing is so fundamental to being able to keep producing work, that at the very least - make prizes and grants tax free.

—Housing is a huge issue for artists. So I'd also love to see **more funding for housing co-ops for creative people.**

—**Reversal of the Job-ready Graduates policy**, and bring back free education. The devastating debt experienced by those who go into the Humanities and the arts — fields that are of crucial importance to a healthy culture and often extremely underpaid — is a blight on the culture. Please make this a priority to change this destructive LNP policy as soon as possible.

—**Recognise and acknowledge that writers and arts practitioners are themselves the biggest subsidisers of the arts in Australia**, with their countless unpaid or underpaid hours contributed because they are passionate about what they do and believe it makes a difference.

—And in recognising and acknowledging this — please **publicly defend the subsidising of the arts. Explain to the electorate why it matters and why it is fair.** Explain how writing is at the basis of almost every cultural practice we enjoy and learn from and are enriched by. And that funding of artists trickles down and enriches the whole community.

—**Increase publishing subsidies for important but less commercial books.** Publishers are closing down or playing it safe and no longer publishing works that aren't guaranteed sellers due to the ever increasing costs of paper, printing, and the enormous postage costs in a country like Australia.

Australian writers have to compete against every English language nation in the world — including those with 10 or 20 times the population base as ours, as well as against books from older cultures in translation. And these books often arrive in Australia with the huge benefit of much bigger publicity budgets in their original countries.

It is impossible for Australian authors of culturally significant and innovative work to compete fairly without publishing subsidies.

—Introduce a book postage rate. This would have a huge effect on the industry. Most small presses in Australia — publishing vital innovative work that invigorates the entire writing ecosystem — sell books in small batches or online to individual buyers. They have to pay around \$14 for postage for a single book — thus increasing the purchase price in a way that drastically deters buyers. A book rate for postage would also encourage people to buy books and send them as presents. Paying \$14 on the top of the price of a book (already much greater than what they can buy a book from overseas), is a huge dampener on the industry.

—Ensure freedom from Political interference on the Boards of publicly funded arts organisations and funding bodies

We have seen some deeply disturbing examples of Boards acting to censor certain writers who have been involved in humanitarian activism, even when the actual work involved has no problematic elements.

Writers and artists need to be actively engaged in the life of the community and that involves being informed and involved in the big issues of the day. It is vital that this kind of McCarthyist silencing attempts do not become a feature of the Australian cultural scene. Not only is this causing terrible disruption and loss for writers — but it will create an atmosphere of anticipatory self-censorship which is cancerous to a healthy culture.

Arms length funding.

Peer-dominated boards.

Defend artistic freedom.

Thanks so much for viewing my submission.

Yours sincerely,
Beth Spencer

