

National Cultural Policy Submission

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Public and anonymous



Short submission (text box 500 words or less)

The new National Cultural Policy is really important and I welcome it. I would like to raise the following points:

1. Summary: The current climate for arts creatives is stifling important stories.

I am a female author, award-winning, and my free-lance arts practice is as a co-writer with First Nations Elders in remote Western Australia to record and amplify their voices, their stories, their perspectives. My first book, written under their direction and co-design, won a national history award and was shortlisted for international literature awards. I've been invited by the same families to continue writing their stories, so that these stories don't get lost as the older people pass on. But I am finding it impossible now to win any grants or funding - and impossible even to interest publishers in these important stories. I was shortlisted one year for more than seven fellowships / writing grants worth \$120,000 but nothing came through at the end of the day - my work is recognised nationally and applauded, but not supported. I came away with a number of second places but there is rarely cash support for second. Meanwhile, the Aunties and their families are waiting out in the spinifex - no computers, and no desire to write but plenty of desire to have a writer work with them to enable them to tell their story so that their grandchildren, and the world, may know what they have seen and experienced and know. They're waiting, and asking me about our next book. I have to keep saying that I can't get funding. (And I've been working as a harvest casual just to make ends meet, no writing happening at all.)

Who is making the rules that First Nations people have to write their own books if they want a book? Do you have to build your own house if you want one? No, you engage a builder. Why should Aboriginal people, especially in remote communities, have their voices and opportunities effectively silenced by the demand that they do it themselves or not at all? How about some opportunities for working together in the arts? How about some recognition that Aboriginal people might want to work with artists of non-Aboriginal backgrounds to achieve their arts / publishing / writing goals? A place for every story must include First Nations stories that are co-written with their own free choice of writer, of any background.

2. Summary: Support and opportunities for telling 'every story' are limited and are skewed to particular stories at present. The results of prizes and fellowships over the last few years seem to reflect a preferential bias towards those who can demonstrate (racial and/or gender) marginalisation. This may be affirmative action but it is also discrimination. How about some funding support where racial backgrounds and skin colour are entirely unknown to the judges? Blind judging. No names nor backgrounds visible until after the project-based, merit-based decision is made. Wouldn't that be in everyone's interest - a place for every story? If you want to support a place for every story, that must surely include a way of channeling support to artists of merit, even if they are not First Nations, nor LGBTIQA, nor POC, nor well connected / well known to the judges.

3. Summary: Support for women seems to have fallen off the arts agenda. 'A place for every story' must include women artists too.

It seems to me that Australia is likely to lose a lot of stories unless genuinely inclusive funding becomes available.