

National Cultural Policy Submission

Tim Elliott

I am 52 years old, and have worked as a journalist for 30 years. I have written several books and of course been an avid reader. Never in my life have I seen Australian writers and writing more in need of support than right now.

Australian writers have long had an outsized impact on our national identity. They have entertained and educated. They have explained Australian to Australians, reinforced our sense of self, and projected our culture overseas. They have been at the heart of the creative economy, generating tens of thousands of jobs in publishing, journalism, academia, libraries, events and festivals, and flow on industries including radio, film, TV and stage and podcast production.

And yet writers themselves are largely ignored and pitifully remunerated. Most of us long ago accepted that ours is a precarious profession (despite there being no prima facie reason that this should be the case). All that writers require to thrive is a semblance of security, and the stable and sustainable support for the ecosystem that goes into making it possible to have their work reach an audience. Writers festivals. Writers centres. Literary journals. Start up publishing houses. Grants. Residencies. Mentorships. Reading programs.

Support for literature and writing needs to be embedded in long term arts planning. It needs to be recognised as a stand alone funding priority. And there is no special pleading here. All writers ask for is a fair go. If just one tiny fraction of the colossal subsidies thrown at extractive industries in Australia were redirected to writing and books, the impact on our national identity and creative industries would repay the investment many times over.

This new Labor government has the mandate and wherewithal to make this happen. Conservative governments aren't going to do it. I ask that the government act boldly, and grab with both hands this rare opportunity here to enrich our national culture and economy.