

National Cultural Policy Submission

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Submitted: As an individual

Office for the Arts

Department of Infrastructure Transport, Regional Development, Communications and the Arts

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Madam/Sir

My name is Andrew Cronin, and I am the author of three novels, as yet unpublished. I have been writing for many years, and like the vast majority of authors I fund myself through my 'regular' job as a firefighter. I would first like to say that I find it astounding that I am sending this to a department that also involves transport and development, with arts tacked on to the end. I imagine other countries around the world that value their culture would find this astounding as well. It tells us a lot about how little Australia thinks about its own culture and the arts in general.

One of my favourite sayings, when people question me about the value of art to the average person, is : 'Life is a shitstorm for which art is the only umbrella' (author unknown). Language aside, I think it encapsulates perfectly one aspect of the value of art, and that is its ability to remove people from the mundanity or hardships of everyday life, even if its only for small periods. This collectively can lift the spirit of a whole nation. Everyone needs an outlet from life, and art in its many forms is it.

But art is also a lot more than this, particularly in my field of literature. It also documents and adds to a country's culture in ways that are priceless. When I think of authors like Joseph Furphy, Miles Franklin, Tim Winton, Kate Grenville, Peter Carey, Richard Flanagan, just to name a scant few, I think of the indelible and immeasurable ways they have contributed to our culture. Yet, for example, Tim Winton's *Cloudstreet*, or Kate Grenville's *The Idea of Perfection*, may not have been written if it wasn't for the support from the Council of the Arts. I think the average person would be staggered if they knew how small is the number of well-known and published literary artists that make a full time living from their art, and that those few who do, have to rely frequently on grants and fellowships, and other freelance projects. I feel it says a lot about our society that social media 'influencers' and self-styled Youtube stars can make hundreds of thousands of dollars, and literary artists who make a long term contribution to a society are generally paupers.

For myself I push on. Like most people I have a mortgage and a family and giving up permanent work to pursue my art is simply not possible. I believe my most recent novel, about my great grandfather who was a Tasmanian aboriginal soldier in WW1 who went to London, fell in love with an English woman, then seemingly disappeared from the records, is culturally significant. Especially given the research done on how Aboriginal Tasmanians fared before, during, and after the war. Nevertheless, under the current state of publishing, and literary arts funding in Australia, it may well end up languishing at the bottom of some slush pile somewhere never to be discovered.

To this end, obviously I believe that funding for the literary arts needs to drastically increase. I don't think there is one particular scheme that is the answer. It necessarily needs to be multi-factorial. In my opinion the important ideas are : Creating a national plan and funding framework for literature through the Australia Council, modernising our once innovative Lending Rights schemes to include digital formats, and introducing a grants and fellowship scheme through the commonwealth that will capture and record the stories behind our cultural diversity. I also like the idea of the 'living wage' pilot, and the valuable lessons we can learn from the Irish on this, a nation with a long literary history that recognises this.

Literature is the artform that ultimately takes longest to realise. It can often take years to write a novel, especially one with considerable literary and cultural merit. It is this very reason that funding is so important. Without it Australia loses so much. A nation with a rich literary culture, with appropriate funding, benefits not just culturally, socially, and educationally, but also in the economical benefits that flow on in so many other areas.

I give my permission for my submission to be made public and published on the Office for the Arts website.

Yours sincerely

Andrew Cronin