

National Cultural Policy Submission

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Submitted: As an individual

Background

I am a writer based in Melbourne. My latest novel, *Room for a Stranger* (2019) was longlisted for the Miles Franklin Award and shortlisted for the NSW Premier's Multicultural Award. My first book, *Australia Day* (2017) won the Victorian Premier's Literary Award for fiction and the Victorian Premier's Literary Award for an unpublished manuscript. I have been involved as a judge for various literary awards and as a mentor for emerging writers. My nonfiction has been published widely in Australian newspapers and literary journals.

The centrality of the artist

I am in the privileged position of having dual careers in the fields of medicine and writing, which has proven essential because the income I earn from writing is not nearly enough to support me and my family. With the exception of a few internationally successful authors, most writers in Australia are in the position of needing one, or sometimes several, additional jobs to sustain their income. Others rely on their partners and families to support them. Currently, grants and writing fellowships are few and far between and funding is ad hoc and short term with artists spending precious time filling out documents to justify their art, rather than working on the art itself.

The problem with this model, in which writing is a luxury, is that the industry risks becoming dominated by artists from a particular educational background and economic class. A national cultural policy should recognize this and work to create an environment in which all writers with talent and something new and important to contribute to the literary landscape are nurtured to their full potential, regardless of their background and economic status. A crucial first step on this path is to put the artist at the centre of the funding and to make the pursuit of writing a viable career option. Consideration should be given to the following initiatives:

- The introduction of a national funding framework for books and reading to ensure a holistic, cohesive and sustainable approach
- An increase the number of fellowships on offer including a focus on First Nations storytelling and writing from outer-metropolitan, regional and remote areas
- Public funding for writing projects at or above ASA recommended rates of pay
- An extension of the Public Lending Rights scheme to include Digital Lending Rights
- The introduction of a minimum threshold of Australian-authored literary texts in the Australian Curriculum
- The introduction of a tax exemption for writing awards