

National Cultural Policy Submission

Public Lending Right Committee

Submitted: On behalf of a not-for-profit arts organisation, on behalf of government or government body

The Public Lending Right Committee is a reference and advisory committee to Lending Rights within the Department of Infrastructure, Transport, Regional Development, Communications and the Arts.

From its establishment in 1974 to the present the Public Lending Right (PLR) has recompensed eligible Australian creators and publishers for their books being available in public lending libraries and supported the enrichment of Australian culture by encouraging the creation and publication of Australian books.

Lending Rights provide visible support for Australian culture and is an integral element of a national cultural policy. The opportunity exists to respond to the increase in production and demand for books in digital form, which accelerated in recent years, to expand eligibility into the digital environment with a digital lending right.

What challenges and opportunities do you see in the pillar or pillars most relevant to you? Feel free to respond to any or all pillars:

The Centrality of the Artist

The centrality of the creators is clearly outlined in the Public Lending Right Act. The Public Lending Right (PLR) was established by the Australian Government to make payments to eligible creators and publishers to compensate for the availability of their books in public lending libraries.

The scheme also aims to enrich Australian culture by encouraging the growth and development of Australian writing and publishing.

The paucity of income experienced by many authors has been exposed in research and expressed clearly by the Society of Authors (ASA) and when asked creators respond that PLR provides a valuable source of income. While the scheme operates effectively an opportunity exists for an increase in the financial commitment to the scheme together with its expansion to include digital materials (ebooks and eaudio) as outlined in the section below **Reaching the Audience**.

Reaching the Audience

An opportunity exists to expand the PLR scheme to include digital formats (ebooks and eaudio). Digital formats are ideal for sections of the community who are unable to visit libraries, such as the housebound, people with limited vision or who are blind, and people with mobility problems, and expands access for people in regional and remote communities.

The demand for library materials in digital format had already begun to increase prior to the impact of COVID19 in 2020 and increased substantially with the enforced closure of libraries during the pandemic. The trend has continued in 2021 and 2022 with readers embracing digital formats as an alternative to print, and libraries have responded by increasing their investment in ebooks and eaudio resources.

At the 2021 House of Representatives Inquiry into Australia's Creative and Cultural Industries and Institutions, the issue of a digital lending right was raised by a number of stakeholders and was the focus of a Committee hearing session with the Australian Society of Authors (ASA) and the Australian

Library and Information Association (ALIA) on 19 February 2021. Evidence presented to the inquiry demonstrated that PLR and ELR are highly regarded by creators and publishers and deliver much needed financial support. As libraries increasingly move to digital formats it is timely and necessary for digital materials to be included as eligible under the schemes.

There are precedents for the inclusion of digital publications in lending right schemes as both Canada and the UK have expanded their schemes to include ebooks and eaudio in recent years. The decision has been welcomed by authors and publishers in those countries and were considered necessary modernisations to ensure the schemes remained effective.

The PLR Committee in Australia has been discussing the increase in digital library materials and it feels strongly that extending eligibility of the schemes to include digital materials would be in line with the objectives of the *Public Lending Rights 1985 Act*. With the Inquiry into Australia's Creative and Cultural Industries and Institutions and increasing pressure from the sector, the Committee considers it appropriate to include digital formats in the PLR scheme.