

National Cultural Policy Submission

Anonymous

Submitted: On behalf of a for-profit arts business; As an artist; As an individual

2. 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:

1. First Nations	I am not a first nations artist but am constantly trying to shape my practice to be sensitive towards, inclusive of and respectful towards first nations people and stories. Non first nations people need to be provided with training and support to allow them to provide appropriate engagement with first nations people, as well as on how to respectfully include or respectfully leave out stories that are not theirs to tell. Urgent protocols are required.
2. A Place for Every Story	It is becoming harder to get stories out and I earn less per word now than I did in the 1990s

4. Are there any other things that you would like to see in a National Cultural Policy?

Specific story publishing and music publishing support for emerging artists is required, especially given that even after a long career writing, an artist can still be 'emerging' in Australia, where career opportunities are very limited. Australia needs specific help for writers – for example, I have a fellowship to write about some personal experiences which are relevant to Australian policy directives, yet I have spent all year attempting to secure even the smallest grants to develop my work, and been rejected at every step. This is despite being widely published and having particular insights into my topic that are broadly relevant to Australia. At each stage I spend several days applying for funding and participating in feedback loops, only to be told the criteria has changed, or I was very close, the competition was strong, and I should try again as my story is very important.

You might think an emerging writer who has spent 20 years developing their career and qualifications should just give up, right? Wrong! I have a long history of publishing in Australia's most highly regarded publications. That does not mean I can get my next story published, or that I can live off what each story pays.

A story I published in the mainstream media just two days ago has already been syndicated around the world. That's the best indicator of seeing how important a story is, but it does nothing to generate income for me as the writer of that story.

Then there is the cost of publishing. Because yes, we writers, poorly paid though we are, must pay to have our work developed before it's even considered for publication. That's how tight the market is.

Writers are constantly paying for editing, manuscript assessment, development fees, structural edits and feedback – the cost of which well exceeds any earning capacity from published work. Most competition/grant/contract/fellowship winners have already developed their work with editors they have paid.

A story that takes months to write and shape earns me a day's pay for someone in another industry. Yet the research, rewrites and attention to detail required is immense.

I am then legally responsible for anyone who decides to sue. It makes me wonder why I publish anything at all.

Out of this I must pay for all of my own equipment as well as the professional development of my material. And if you think I'm just not very good at business – consider this. A story I recently wrote for a mainstream Australian newspaper earned \$700 but it took me three months of research to write. At that rate how could I earn more than ten thousand a year? The same story would have earned double that twenty years ago as the pay per word tumbles.

A prominent publisher is presently considering my manuscript. But before they can offer a contract, I first need to spend a good two years developing my work, and then I need to pay thousands of dollars for manuscript assessments, structural edits and rewrites before it can be considered.

This takes the voice of Australian writing out of the margins and places it into the hands of the few who can afford to take time away from other work to write, all to develop a work that may only ever earn a few thousand dollars, as most successful Australian books do. This is the working reality of Australian writers.

Firstly, Australia needs a Universal Basic Income for artists, especially writers – and I say this as a multidisciplinary artist myself, with over 20 years success as a freelance writer, yet still struggling to earn.