

National Cultural Policy Submission

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Submitted:

On behalf of a not-for-profit arts organisation: New England Writers' Centre

On behalf of a for-profit arts business: small publisher Christmas Press

As an artist: Author

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:

First Nations

First Nations stories are of central importance to the cultural life of Australia. The challenges are around enabling opportunities for emerging and more established creators, and greater access for audiences, whilst not trying to direct or control from a non-First Nations perspective.

A Place for Every Story

Challenges: Representing stories from all over in a way that doesn't dilute them

Opportunities: More possibilities for stories to be produced in a variety of ways, eg encouraging audio as well as print and e-editions

The Centrality of the Artist

Challenges: Precarity of income and short-termism in government funding as well as publishing industry issues

Opportunities: Bringing in Digital Lending Rights, and a significant rise in the rate of both PLR and ELR to reflect rising inflation, are practical initiatives which would be crucial in supporting writers, illustrators and publishers. Also, a left-field idea: encouraging/supporting media, including newspapers, to publish more paid pieces by writers, which would pay a decent amount and help to support their income, as well as extend audience reach.

Strong Institutions

Challenges: Getting Govt to recognise the important role played by small organisations (including small publishers) and regional organisations (such as, in NSW, the regional Writers' Centres like New England, Dubbo, South Coast, Hunter and Wagga), not just national or State ones.

Opportunities: Better recognition, and support of the sustainability of small and regional organisations would enormously benefit our sector (Literature) but also other arts sectors. Recognition too of the increasingly important role played by small publishers in weaving more diverse and unusual strands into our national literary tapestry would be also beneficial.

On a whole-of-industry level, regular advisory/discussion meetings between the Arts Ministry and representatives of authors, publishers, agents, editors, booksellers, librarians, printers and other book professionals, would be a great development and potentially offer avenues for change. These would need to be facilitated by the Ministry. We need ongoing commitment and continuity from government, not just occasional one-off consultations, valuable as these can be.

Reaching the Audience

Challenges: The public valuing of literature as a visible, accessible and important art form, as well as a major if not in fact central component of our cultural ecosystem, is sadly not strong in Australian public life.

Opportunities: More visible appreciation of books (in any format including print, audio, digital) by public figures including politicians (as is done in countries such as France!). Also, there needs to be valuing of literary heritage as well as contemporary literature, and valuing of popular as well as critically acclaimed genres. Media, including newspapers, encouraged to publish more reviews of books: and reviewers themselves to be valued as an important part of the national cultural conversation.

Please tell us how each of the 5 pillars are important to you and your practice and why. Feel free to respond to any or all that are applicable to you:

First Nations

In my role as representing the New England Writers' Centre, which has always sought to offer opportunities for local emerging First Nations creators, provide access to literary events and workshops for local First Nations audiences, especially children, and to work respectfully and productively on collaborations with local professional First Nations writers and illustrators, I affirm, personally and on behalf of NEWC, the importance of First Nations literary arts to the cultural life of our region, as well as the nation generally.

A Place for Every Story

Living in a regional area, and coming from a diverse CALD first-generation migrant background, I know how challenging it can sometimes be to get all kinds of stories not only created but heard—yet how important it is.

The Centrality of the Artist

As a full-time writer whose long career has spanned many years and seen many changes in the publishing industry and national cultural atmosphere, I know intimately the ups and downs of the writer's life.

Strong Institutions

As Chair of the New England Writers' Centre (a voluntary role), I see the enormously positive impact that a good, dedicated regional arts organisation like NEWC can have on the potential and opportunities for writers and illustrators based outside the capital cities; and I also see the difficulties such an organisation has to constantly struggle to overcome, due to inadequate funding and recognition.

And as director of a small-press publisher, I know very well the big challenges faced by small creative businesses.

Reaching the Audience

Reaching the audience is absolutely crucial: for at the heart of literature is not only communication, but enrichment: of imagination, of potential, of connection.

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

Much, much more recognition of the place of literature and story as a core arts form and a central part of culture —too often in public documents it's tacked on as a mere mention after more visible art forms, and its percentage of funding via national agencies like the Australia Council and State arts funding bodies is disproportionately small. We need that to change.