

# National Cultural Policy Submission

## **Submission for Inquiry into Australia's Creative and Cultural Industries and Institutions**

To Whom it May Concern,

Thank you for the opportunity to make a submission for the Inquiry into Creative and Cultural Industries in Australia. This submission is focused specifically on literature.

My name is Danielle Binks; and I am a published author – I was editor and contributor to *Begin, End, Begin: A #LoveOzYA Anthology* released in 2017 with Harper Collins, and designed to champion 'Loving Australian Young Adult Literature' (LoveOzYA) which went on to win the 2018 Young Adult Book of the Year Award, by the Australian Book Industry.

My debut solo novel was the bestselling and award-winning middle-grade (for 8-12 year-olds) *The Year the Maps Changed* which came out in 2020 with Lothian Children's Books (Hachette Australia imprint) and went on to be a Children's Book Council of Australia (CBCA) Notable book, and was Shortlisted for the Prime Minister's Literary Awards 2021 – it will be released with US HarperCollins imprint Quill Tree Books in North America this October, and a Polish translation is forthcoming with publisher Wydawnictwo Widnokrąg.

My second book with Lothian/Hachette was the 2021 young adult novel, *The Monster of Her Age* – winner of the Indie Book Award 2022 in the Young Adult category. I have two more books contracted to Hachette, for forthcoming release in 2023 and 2024 – both will be books for young people.

I am also a literary agent with the Melbourne boutique, Jacinta di Mase Management – a literary agency committed to the creation of quality books that engage, entertain, and inspire. We represent across all genres, forms, and readerships, Australian authors like; Clementine Ford, Jane Caro, Aaron Fa'aoso, Judith Brett, Sher Rill Ng, Kylie Orr, Jenna Guillaume, Kay Kerr, Briony Stewart, Clare Wright, Abdi Aden, Briar Rolfe, Jane Harrison, Cary Findlay and many, many more.

Through my work as literary agent I have been Secretary of the Australian Literary Agents Association in both 2021 and 2022; as an organisation we provide a public presence and a point of contact for Australian literary agencies and their staff.

As of 2021; I have also been a creative-writing teacher and lecturer at my alum RMIT University in Melbourne – teaching first-year ‘Writing Fiction’ students, second year ‘Writing Fiction for Young Adults,’ and a ‘Towards Publication’ final-year class for students nearing completion of their major manuscript work.

Finally – I am an avid reader, books-enthusiast and ‘Youth Literature Advocate’ who has been heavily involved in Australia’s literary community and publishing scene since at least 2009, when I began a ‘solo book club’ book review blog, ‘Alpha Reader’ for the purposes of cataloguing my own reading pleasure – which grew into my being tapped to write freelance articles, formal reviews, and moderate Festival, Library and Bookshop panels, and just generally find an outlet for my bibliophile passions.

I outline my history to further highlight why literature is my specialist subject and purpose of this letter submission. It is also that – with my various hats and presence in the publishing community – I am often asked to comment on the ‘state of play,’ the health and vitality of our industry and what needs changing, or improving. I am even going to be part of a New York Publishers' Program delegation, with support of the Australia Council for the Arts, this September; such is my involvement and degree of trust I command with great honour, within this industry.

I do not take that trust lightly, and I will do my best to live up to the confidences that have been placed in me, on behalf of my own authors and students, my colleagues and readers.

I do not exaggerate when I say that literature is one of this country’s greatest exports and successful creative industries. The Australian publishing industry generates over \$2 billion in revenue per annum and does not rely on government subsidy. And that’s not even calculating the cultural currency of literature.

Our authors often put Australia on the map, particularly for international audiences – and this makes sense, since stories are how we not only come to know ourselves but how others view us. Australia’s history has been one of great struggle and sacrifice in order to know ourselves,

and see our lives reflected on the page. It is a struggle that our country has known for a long time, dating as far back as Henry Lawson's famous indignation that; 'It is quite time that our children were taught a little more about their country, for shame's sake.' And even now we see the way that First Nations and Indigenous Australians must claw to be heard and their stories valued – Bruce Pascoe's *Dark Emu* is just one example and testament to that. But our stories have helped shape this country and our society – whether it's Miles Franklin's *My Brilliant Career*, May Gibb's *Snugglepoot and Cuddlepoot*, Melina Marchetta's *Looking for Alibrandi*, Jane Harper's *The Dry*, or even Liane Moriarty's *Big Little Lies*. 'We read to know we are not alone,' – the character of C.S. Lewis says this line in William Nicholson's play, *Shadowlands* and books are how Australians have come to know themselves, and each other.

But our industry is under threat. The ability of all Australians to know and see themselves on the page is not one that our government can continue pour hope into – and little else – and keep expecting healthy returns. Australian writers need increased government support so that they can keep creating the content these industries rely upon.

It is only 1% of Australian writers who are able to earn a living-wage from their work. Average income derived from practicing as an author was estimated to be \$12,900 in a 2015 Macquarie University study, with an average total income from all sources at \$62,000. The Australia Council's 'Making Art Work' report from 2017 found that of an average annual income of \$43,500, Australian writers made only an average of \$19,900 from their creative practice. More significantly, this report found that 62 per cent of writers earn less than \$10,000 a year from their creative practice, even though their creative practice required a reported 61 per cent of their working hours.

The pandemic hit authors and the literature sector, hard. But what really hurt was the lack of government support during the waves of Covid-19 lockdowns – in particular, the locking-out from JobKeeper and JobSeeker aid because most authors derive income from freelance work (school talks, festival appearances, grant support, and so much else that is still important work – but not valued through a rigid lens of bureaucracy that was ill-equipped to help art survive during this greatest of struggles).

Furthermore, and pandemic aside; literature currently receives the least government funding across arts industries. Since 2013, funding for literature through the Australia Council for the Arts has decreased by 44 per cent, from \$9 million in 2013-14 to \$5.1 million in 2018-19. Literature is also the only artform that does not receive infrastructure support through a targeted program.

What would really help literature and its many creatives, is if they were properly compensated for their work – and if current schemes designed to pay creators was updated to reflect the changing times and technologies of the day. I am speaking specifically about

**Expansion of Public and Educational Lending Rights Schemes.**

In Australia, PLR and ELR payments are intended to compensate creators for lost royalties when physical **print** books are borrowed from a library for free. The PLR / ELR scheme **does not include** ebooks or digital audiobooks.

At a time when borrowing of ebooks and audiobooks is rapidly increasing, it makes no sense for an author or illustrator to receive PLR payments for a physical book, but nothing if that same book is loaned in a digital format. This ignores the ways in which library users are increasingly accessing content. For reference, the [CIVICA 2020 Libraries Index](#) reported a 56% increase in ebook loans, and a 50% increase in audiobook loans in one year.

Due to the impact of COVID-19, the Australian Library and Information Association (ALIA) has observed a dramatic increase in the use of electronic resources, with libraries reporting the addition of new ebook and audiobook titles. With renewed lockdown in some states, social-distancing restrictions set to remain in place for the foreseeable future, increased investment in digital resources by libraries, and new borrowing patterns that may have a long term effect on the way patrons interact with libraries, the case for digital lending rights has never been more compelling.

The Office for the Arts has been researching and considering an expansion of the scheme; implementation should be made a top priority now.

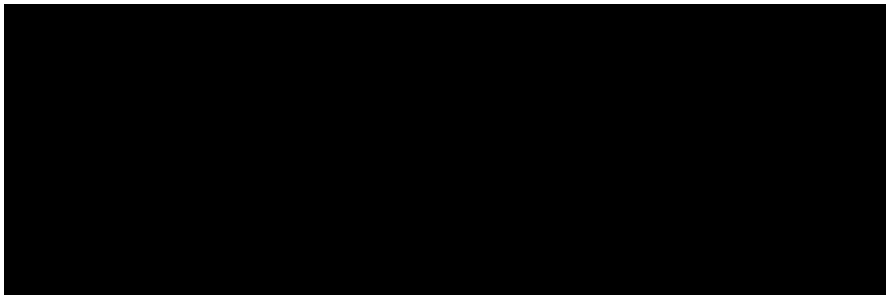
I ask that you call for an appropriate updating of the *Public Lending Right Act 1985*. I ask that you let us be compensated, fairly, for our work. I ask that you treat literature fairly, when it has so often been kicked to the side of previous cultural policies.

Miles Franklin once wrote; *Someone to tell it to is one of the fundamental needs of human beings*. The need to be heard is such a powerful one, and I hope I have imparted to you some important knowledge about the state of the literary arts in this country.

I hope you hear me.

Thank you for your time, and this opportunity.

Yours,



—Danielle Binks