

National Cultural Policy Submission

Name: Truphena Mahindu

Submitted: As an individual

I have completed several creative writing courses at the Australian Writers Centre, focusing mainly on writing for children and young adults. I have completed my first book, which has gone through a manuscript assessment and feedback from literary beta readers.

I'm a member of the Australian Society of Authors, Australian Writers Centre, South Australian Writers Centre, the Society of Children's Book Writers and Illustrators and the Writers Club (composed of beta readers).

I received the most positive review of my manuscript (among sixteen highly talented aspiring authors) but I have been submitting my completed manuscript to publishing houses that accept unsolicited manuscripts without a breakthrough. I have also pitched to agents and publishing houses at writers' festivals and virtual/online pitch opportunities – but still waiting and trying. It sometimes feels like a scream in a dark lonely place.

I was born and raised in Kenya but have spent most of my adult life in Australia, where I live with my husband and three children. I'm an economist by profession but have a keen interest in writing kidlit. Predictably, I found it difficult to find books that represent or inspire my (African) kids. I've gobbled up lots of kidlit for over eighteen years and have been inspired to contribute to this impressionable readership. My books feature a rich mix of kids from all walks of life having unfettered adventure just as kids.

Authors are at the heart of our national culture but are struggling to make a basic living.

The literature sector needs Government support to reach its full potential and to nurture the talent of the future. There is an exciting opportunity to introduce policy settings to support authors' work, invest in the creative economy and enjoy the cultural, social, educational, health and economic dividends that follow.

We are a multi-cultural society, yet the literature through which our children are tutored is all Caucasian. Every year there should be core literature that is written by other cultural groups too, so that by the time a child completes high school, they've had at least three chances to be taught through a set-book for literature classes based on authors from different cultures, one of which must be First Nations people. This will encourage publishing houses to quit discriminating/sidelining marginal cultural groups.

Also, there should be a deliberate attempt by government not to require diverse books to be by or about people with unique characteristics such as sexual orientation, trauma, etc. Diverse authors should have a right like other authors to write about whatever they like and not be boxed in. Nobody boxes in Caucasian authors, so why box in multicultural authors?

The government should fund a mentorship program for multicultural authors to show commitment to Australia's diversity. This should be with a deliberate intention for these

authors to be published, hence the government should have an active and ongoing collaboration with publishing houses to keep a certain percentage for multicultural authors published every season/year. Cultural imbalance in literature will not fix itself. It's also clear that editors, agents and publishers are nearly all white. The government should be deliberate about working with publishing houses to employ literary professionals from minority cultures at all levels of publishing. This will address the implicit bias in accepting manuscripts that may not sound like what we're cultured to acknowledge as good (implicit bias). It will also address deliberate bias in the publishing industry.

I do give permission for my submission to be made public and published on the Office for the Arts website.

Yours sincerely,

Truphena Mahindu