

# National Cultural Policy Submission

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## NATIONAL CULTURAL POLICY SUBMISSION

My first book was published in 1980 with the help of a small publisher subsidy from the Literature Board of the Australia Council. I have since published many books in Australia and internationally. The government support my publisher received launched my career as a writer and was part of an Australia Council program of literary development.

But what has happened since?

When I started out, author incomes were said to average around \$12 000 pa. Recent estimates suggest that authors are still only earning around that amount, meaning that, in real terms, writers are seriously poorer than they were then.

I find it extraordinary that over the last forty-odd years things have not only not improved for Australian writers but have gone backwards. Literature has a very high participation rate\* but receives less than other major Australian art forms from government sources. How can this be?

It seems that authors, despite the efforts of bodies like the Australian Society of Authors, are not well represented in national cultural policies or institutions. This means that government support for literary work is limited to a relatively small number of modest grants from the Australia Council for the Arts and the PLR/ELR scheme. This excellent initiative could, and should, be expanded to include digital lending rights.

The commendable Prime Minister's Literary Awards are also available to a very few winners. Could not winners receive a smaller amount, plus the glory? This would free up much of the \$600 000 to be redirected more broadly among struggling writers rather than going in a lump sum to a few deserving and successful authors who have reached the finals of a prestigious national award.

Welcome though these acknowledgments are, they seem to be *ad hoc*. There is a need for a coordinated national and state/territory literary plan or framework that identifies short, medium and long-term goals, how to reach them and where to provide funds and other support, such as author residencies, for example, towards achieving those ends.

The federal government avowedly 'values artists. A government that does not see the arts as an optional extra, but as fundamental to who we are as a nation.' Tony Burke, Minister for the Arts). This is a welcome and overdue government recognition of the value and

importance of the arts to the identity and coherence of the national community. Authors need to be seen as vital contributors to this worthy ideal and supported to do so.

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\* Australia Council for the Arts' 2020 Arts Participation Survey, 72% of respondents read for pleasure.