

# National Cultural Policy Submission

Dr. Danielle Clode

Dear Minister Burke,

Thank you for your invitation to contribute to the discussion about a National Cultural Policy. And thank you for working towards having one.

Having worked as a professional creative writer and author for more than 25 years, my contributions will primarily focus on the role of literature in a National Cultural Policy. While literature is an important part of the arts, it also has distinctive differences from many other creative practices, particularly the way its value extends far beyond artistic practice into a foundational role in education, literacy, media and communication.

Writers are primary producers in a creative economy that underpins entire industries of (better paid) jobs in film, publishing, education, libraries, television, printing, design, arts administration etc. Despite this, literature remains very much the poor cousin in the arts, with amongst the lowest median incomes and the lowest levels of funding support. Most writers run small businesses based on a portfolio of skills – teaching, public speaking, school appearances, editing, commissioned writing - vulnerable to exploitation in both the gig economy and by entrenched and obscured publishing conventions.

While direct government support is always important for creative artists, innovative approaches to funding that reduces risks and value-adds to author productivity offer many ways of multiplying the benefits authors provide to a vibrant, well-educated and compassionate democracy. In the process, such strategies have the capacity to provide a sustainable career for more than just the handful of Australian writers who strike it lucky. It will also increase diversity in Australian publishing by allowing those from disadvantaged and less represented backgrounds (including Indigenous voices) to be able to afford to contribute to Australian literature. The vast majority of Australian writers earn less than the minimum wage from their work – a small amount extra has a huge impact on their viability. There are many strategies that could promote the greater viability of writing as a career in Australia, many of which have already proven successful in other countries with proud literary cultures.

A few strategies and approaches worthy of further consideration (amongst others) include:

- Establishment of a specific national policy for literature and recognition of how this intersects of this with other government policy priorities (such as education, media diversity and ownership, culture etc)
- Increasing and restoring the pool of arts funding and investigating ways of making it more equitably distributed across the different forms, with a significant proportion going directly to practitioners.
- Providing tax-free status for creative income below a certain income threshold, such as lending rights, prize money, grants and royalties.
- Removing the GST from books to better support authors, publishers, literacy and reading
- Expanded funding to public and educational lending rights schemes and extension of this program for digital lending rights

- Supporting compensation for copyrighted materials used under fair dealing guidelines and ensuring all layers of government as well as government-supported industries commit and adhere to these responsibilities rather than launching court actions to avoid payments to creators.
- Indexation of lending rights and arts funding to keep pace with inflation.
- Support for parallel importation protection for a local publishing industry that publishes local authors and local stories
- Direct funding for public school libraries, school librarians and author visits for all schools.
- Support for industry standards for payment of authors for judging, festival and public speaking events.
- Adoption of such industry standards for payment by government departments employing writers as peer reviewers, literary judges etc.
- Better engagement with and funding of the peak bodies for advocacy and author support such as the Australian Society of Authors and the state Writers Centres.
- Increase support for Australian cultural products, such as restoring Australian content guidelines on commercial TV and increasing funding to our public broadcasters so that they can better support Australian writers and their content.
- Industry investigation into standard publishing practices and contracts and whether they represent a fair pay for fair work, an equitable distribution of profits and to identify and reduce exploitative practices.
- Commissioning research into best practice for industry support overseas, such as
  - Norway's 'Cultural Rucksack' program embedding culture in curriculum, the Cultural Commission purchasing program of significant books for libraries and the Norsk Forfattersentrum which supports and co-ordinates paid author appearances and activities in schools, libraries and festivals.
  - Ireland's basic universal income for writers and tax-free thresholds for creative income.

I look forward to the results of the National Cultural Policy and the role literature will play in supporting Australia's creative and cultural growth in the future,

Regards

Dr. Danielle Clode