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Submission on National Cultural Policy

As an emerging Queensland writer and editor, I am writing in support of and to emphasise the need for Australia's National Cultural Policy to include **A national plan for literature.**

Why? Because Literature is the only major art form without a national plan or funding framework through Australia Council.

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

As just one example, I work 3-4 jobs per year (depending on contracts and funding) to make ends meet and to enable the time and flexibility I require to write. I am a person with disability and am immunocompromised, meaning that I am physically unable to work in excess of 20 hours per week, but I am constantly having to push myself by working in intense, deadline-driven bursts to achieve a liveable income, to sustain a career in the industry I am most passionate about and spent 6 years studying professionally, only to be without any safety net, leave or sick pay, without any opportunities for promotion or progression, and to be facing unemployment every 6-12 months due to a temporary contract not renewing.

This valuable and under-recognised sector needs Government support to reach its full potential and to nurture and make secure the talent of the future.

We need stable, secure jobs in the arts that pay industry rates and provide equity and opportunities for career development and progression, especially for those with disability.

There is an exciting opportunity to introduce policies to support the work of authors, invest in the creative economy and reap the cultural, social, educational, health and economic benefits that follow. Authors do more than just write books. We contribute to the cultural wealth of the economy and to society. We communicate complex ideas, themes, knowledges, make connections, drive positive change, stimulate intellectual growth, and anticipate what's next.

But we cannot do what we do alone – Literary creators need a funding framework which coordinates funding between state and federal levels of government, defines the priorities for the literature sector over the medium and long-term and locks in multi-year funding. Similar to the Funding Frameworks administered by Australia Council for the performing arts, visual arts and crafts, and contemporary music, Australian Literature needs its own vision.

What does a national plan for literature look like?

1. Direct investment in authors

a. Introduce a Commonwealth fellowship and grants program to directly invest in authors.

As the most vulnerable individuals in the entire supply chain, we must prioritise direct investment in our writers. We call for a Commonwealth Fellowships and Grants program which includes a focus on diverse publishing and writing from outer-metropolitan, regional and remote areas designed to fuel the talent pipeline and build the creative economy of the future. We also request support for industry mentorships and investment in diversity-led organisations to develop, publish and promote the work of diverse writers and illustrators.

b. Ensure public funding is contingent on authors being paid minimum rates of pay

Authors do not fall under the protection of awards or industrial agreements and, as freelancers, have to negotiate on a case-by-case basis to be paid fairly. The government may assist by ensuring that public funding for projects that engage authors is always contingent on the payment of authors at or above ASA recommended rates of pay.

c. Modernise Australia's lending rights schemes to include digital formats

The Australian Lending Rights schemes ([PLR / ELR](#)) are world-leading and lauded by authors but, unfortunately, have fallen out of date and require urgent modernisation. Currently, lending rights payments to authors and illustrators are limited to print books and do not include ebooks or digital audiobooks. Changing technology and COVID has seen an enormous shift towards e-borrowing, and an increase in libraries' digital collections. The PLR/ELR schemes must be updated to reflect contemporary library collections which include digital formats in addition to print books. And the budget for PLR / ELR must be increased by at least 20% (\$4.4 million) to allow for existing digital books to be included in the PLR /ELR schemes and forecast growth in digital collections.

d. Roll out a 'Living Wage' pilot scheme over 3 years

We encourage the Government to think boldly about tackling financial insecurity for our authors. We support the introduction of a 'Living Wage' pilot to be rolled out in Australia, similar to the [Basic Income for the Arts \(BIA\)](#) pilot scheme currently being run in Ireland.

2. Increase support for the literary ecosystem

a. A substantial increase to overall literature funding through Australia Council will provide significant resilience to the literary sector, including to service organisations which support authors, award schemes, fellowships, mentorships, and to literary festivals and publications – this includes funding for digital platforms such as [AustLit](#), Australia's longest-running digital humanities project established in 2001. AustLit (the Australian Literature database) has relied on funding from subscribers and is severely underfunded by the industry it supports the most. It *should* be federally funded and made open access throughout the country in *all* schools, libraries, and universities. In 2022, AustLit will reach one million records, yet its team of eight has been reduced to only three. This is a vital resource we cannot afford to lose.

b. An increase in funding for the Australian Bureau of Statistics would allow for much needed data on levels and type of employment, trends, and revenue across the book industry.

3. Legislative reform which supports creators

a. Establish a working party to examine and introduce author-protective provisions in the Copyright Act.

We encourage the Government to follow European examples of establishing author protections in legislation such as:

- principles requiring appropriate and proportionate remuneration,
- comprehensive and transparent royalty statements, and
- reversion of rights back to the author if the literary or artistic copyright work is not being exploited.

b. Remove tax from literary prizes and Commonwealth grants to authors

c. Maintain a meaningful and robust copyright framework.

4. Educational policy settings

a. Introduce a minimum threshold of Australian-authored content in schools

b. Roll out an authors-in-schools program to increase income for authors, and deliver to students literacy skills, a deeper connection with books, and expertise on writing.

c. Better support tertiary arts education, including facilities and access to rehearsal and performing space, masterclasses, industry workshops, and sustainable careers/employability.

We need a proper literature plan that starts from the ground up and instils a sense of the value and vitality that the arts bring to our culture and to the heart of our great nation.

It's time we recognised the true value of 'writers' as not just 'creative types' or those who will eventually get a 'real job' but as professional communicators who are versatile, highly skilled innovators and are crucial to the workforce across multiple sectors and industries – and their professional development and training needs, their average income, and their job stability, sustainability and progression should not be at the mercy of volatile funding.

Of course, the Arts relies on Science and Technology, but this relationship is co-dependent. STEM needs communicators, innovators, creative and agile thinkers now more than ever. In fact, a more accurate acronym would be STEAM, inclusive of Arts, as it is the driving force in today's society where digital prevalence requires early adaptors, experimenters – *Artists*.

Thank you for your time and consideration. I give permission for my submission to be made public and published on the Office for the Arts website. I also welcome any contact to discuss my submission further and I look forward to staying updated on the next steps taken towards a national plan for literature and a vision for the future that not only includes but celebrates, recognises, and prioritises the vital contribution that authors and creative practitioners make.

Yours sincerely,

Bianca Millroy

