

# National Cultural Policy Submission

The National Centre for Australian Children's Literature Inc

Submitted: On behalf of a not-for-profit arts organisation

**What challenges and opportunities do you see in the pillar or pillars most relevant to you? Feel free to respond to any or all pillars:**

## 1. First Nations

Our First Nations People are the oldest living culture in the world. Their story is the beginning of our national story. Hearing and appreciating these stories is at the heart of building understanding and respect across First Nations and the wider community. There is strong interest in First Nations' culture and their artistic creations. These must be funded, showcased and widely shared across all communities and all ages.

## 2. A Place for Every Story

As a nation it is important that the diversity of all our peoples is recognised and celebrated. Who we are is manifest through our stories. These need a home where they can be collected and shared as a basis for encouraging understanding and future story making. Stories may differ and appear in various forms but all play an important role in highlighting our commonalities and universal dreams, thus bringing us together. Our cultures as expressed in literature appear in both simple and complex forms including print, theatre, film, opera, music, sculpture, immersive and virtual experiences. While the stories of some parts of our shared culture do have dedicated places there are still gaps where this is not the case. One huge gap, addressed below at point 4, is the lack of an adequately funded dedicated place and expert staff to bring together and share these stories written for young people. This is a disservice for everyone so affected.

## 3. The Centrality of the Artist

Creators are at the very heart of expressions about ourselves. For our culture and the arts to thrive creators need to be nurtured, supported and acknowledged with a sense of national pride in their achievements. Australian literary and artistic creators for young people are known the world over. Their stories are widely translated. These creators are world class achievers and their stories are transformed for different audiences. Australian children's stories win Academy Awards (The Lost Thing). They are performed at the Sydney Opera House (The Rabbits). They are created as musical scores (Wilfrid Gordon Macdonald Partridge). They are cinematic successes (The Bad Guys) and they will engage audiences as television series (The Barrumbi Kids - NITV and Tales from Outer Suburbia - both forthcoming).

Our challenge is to strengthen and expand opportunities for creators because, as they thrive, Australia benefits. These achievements earn export income and expand business opportunities worldwide. Their contribution to the national economy should not be underestimated.

## 4. Strong Institutions

Australia has strong and internationally recognised cultural institutions although they are chronically underfunded and unable to meet their national objectives. This must change. There are also gaps that need to be addressed. Currently there is no institution solely dedicated to supporting creative stories for Australia's youth from birth through 25 years of age. The [National Centre for Australian Children's Literature](#), in existence since 1974, now holds \$12M in unique cultural products aimed at

youth. It is well positioned to be that institution, thus enhancing Australia's existing strengths in national institutions.

## **5. Reaching the Audience**

Australia is a vast country with many people living in regional and remote areas while the major institutions are mostly located in major cities or large centres. Technology is providing opportunities for overcoming this 'tyranny of distance' so people, regardless of where they live, can share in our rich cultural heritage. This comes at some cost but is nowhere more important than in the cultural sector.

Over the last quarter century Australia has built an enviable reputation for high quality artistic creations aimed at young people. This has led to a range of organisations whose mission is to ensure such creations enhance the lives of young people. Although diverse, collectively these organisations demonstrate Australia's ability to reach young audiences in different ways. With appropriate funding, staffing and places designed to further develop and exploit their successes, we can reach youth of all ages. Organisations such as the National Centre for Australian Children's Literature, The Children's Book Council of Australia, Indigenous Literacy Foundation, Australian Children's Laureate Foundation, Australian Children's Television Foundation, May Gibbs Children's Literature Trust, Museum of Australian Democracy and the Storybox Library are successfully reaching out, but they could achieve more. Missions, objectives and funding models differ yet there is a very strong shared understanding that literature and story is essential to the lives of our young people.

**Please tell us how each of the 5 pillars are important to you and your practice and why. Feel free to respond to any or all that are applicable to you:**

### **1. First Nations**

The National Centre is committed to collecting and providing information about all books for young people written/illustrated by or about Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples. The Centre's ability to meet this commitment was greatly assisted by funding from the Australian Government in 2019 to develop a database of children's books by and/or about Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples. The database launched with 300 books in July 2020. By August 2022, 545 books feature with new material continuously added. Links to the National Curriculum and teaching resources are provided for each item. Aboriginal languages and story locations are included. Additional online and digital resources bring these stories of culture to each child and educator anywhere anytime. Here First Nations creators tell their own stories while simultaneously sharing their culture, generating understanding and sharing knowledge across cultures.

### **2. A Place for Every Story**

The mission and vision of the National Centre is to collect, document, share and promote Australian children's literature. We aim to ensure that there is an accessible place, physically and virtually, for Australian stories created for young people. We document Australian Children's Literature deeply, broadly and in creative ways so that that it is accessible to anyone interested at any time.

Australia is a country enriched by its dynamic cultural diversity. We can build upon this strength by encouraging the understanding of diversity from birth. Access to stories featuring cultural diversity is an excellent way to do this. At our National Centre we offer the free Cultural Diversity Database to do just that. This collection of over 400 books (and growing constantly) includes an annotation, key

concepts and links to the Australian National Curriculum. Such stories encourage an appreciation of our diversity by demonstrating each story has a cultural background to share.

Yet we are stymied by a lack of physical space. This particularly impacts on our ability to share the creative process and stories about culture. We know that we can inspire and develop future generations of creators when stories can be shared.

### **3. The Centrality of the Artist**

The inspiration of our creators is the flame that drives the creative process. There needs to be adequate support of various kinds, including financial, especially for emerging creators but also for established creators as monetary returns are low and slow to realise.

The National Centre could play an important role in supporting creators by being the dedicated place where they can immerse themselves in the creative process by studying the papers and manuscripts of writers and the preliminary and final artworks by illustrators who have gone before. Such a place would make it possible for creators to come together. Here they could share their individual journeys for mutual support, receive mentoring from established and experienced creators and work with those in the publishing industry.

### **4. Strong Institutions**

Australia has national institutions each with their sphere of influence and ways of sharing their expertise and creations. Yet there is a gap. There is no place in Australia that concentrates solely on our youth and so inspire and produce our future generations of creative people. There are such places around the world: Seven Stories in Newcastle-upon-Tyne (UK), the Eric Carle Museum (Amherst, Mass, US) and the International Youth Library (Munich, Germany) and others. Australia's State Libraries and the National Library regularly borrow our Centre's resources when mounting exhibitions and holding educational programs. In 2018-2019, over 179 days, the National Library of Australia created a national exhibition showcasing the creation of children's stories. *Story Time: Australian Children's Literature* attracted 43,909 visitors, an average of 245 visitors per day, identifying as multi-generational. A well supported institution serving youth is needed.

### **5. Reaching the Audience**

For creativity to thrive there needs to be collections, programs, places and expert staff where this field of endeavour for a young audience can be fostered, supported and shared. Through face-to-face and digital technology, sharing the creative process and the final product is possible. The imagination is the only limitation.

## **1. Are there any other things that you would like to see in a National Cultural Policy?**

Australia needs a variety of physical places and virtual experiences to support young people as they immerse themselves in the art of story-making. Literature plays a huge role in developing our individual and collective cultural identities. Authors, illustrators, publishers, editors and our cultural allied story makers—filmmakers, dramatists, choreographers and other creative individuals—may also benefit from a place showcasing and building expertise in the creative process. Our future creators need and deserve this support. The Australian community strongly supports the creative arts. The 'Creating Our Future: Results of the National Arts Participation Survey' [Australia Council for the Arts survey](#), (2020), reports that 98% of people surveyed engaged with and support the arts. The

National Centre for Australian Children's Literature is the only institution collecting, documenting and sharing stories, particularly the creative process, that is solely dedicated to this particular audience. Currently it all but matches the outcomes of the far better funded and like-minded organisations in other countries. With adequate support the Centre's work, as an experienced collaborator and expert in the field, could achieve so much more.