

# National Cultural Policy Submission

Ruth Skilbeck

Office for the Arts  
Department of Infrastructure Transport, Regional Development, Communications  
and the Arts  
GPO Box 594  
CANBERRA ACT 2601

culturalpolicy@arts.gov.au

22 August 2022

## Submission on National Cultural Policy

To whom it concerns,

My name is Ruth Skilbeck. I have been a professional writer since the early 1980s, starting as a freelance features and reviews writer in Dublin, then working in London, and Sydney, specialising in international contemporary art writing. I have published poetry and short stories, and over the last decade have published two novels and a book of literary studies based on my PhD. I founded a literary arts journal and have edited and published anthologies. I have also started up a publishing business which I still run. It is often said that this is what is needed in Australia. Yet over the last ten years I have not made enough to be able to support myself from my income as an author, or author and publisher. What is even worse is that I was not able to pay the contributors (authors and artists) to my journal, as I was living on penury rations, and in dire financial poverty. The main challenges I face, as an author and publisher, in Australia are lack of support for diversity in publishing, or at least for my publishing, I applied for several grants to publish my anthology and journal but was not awarded any funding. This meant I could not properly make the journal online and could only publish it as a pdf and in print, paperback and hardback which is expensive. I ended up working day and night doing the production and editorial sides myself, as editor, designer, publisher, photographer and writer, which was clearly not sustainable. The challenge was that people did not buy the issues, and the issues were necessarily expensive to cover the print on demand costs, for each one. They were no doubt too expensive. Publishing novels is similarly challenging. The challenges are attracting readers who want to buy one's books, and to have them in the library systems. I see the opportunity for subsidies to authors and publishers, to enable authors to write and publishers to publish new works in Australia. I also see an opportunity for people working in the media it to take a proactive interest in self-publishing authors, and authors published by their own small presses, who do not get the marketing benefits of being published by larger publishers. There is opportunity here for reviewers and readers to discover and promote self-publishing authors, and authors published by their own small presses. There is great innovation happening in self-publishing and in small presses and this is where literary energy is concentrated, in the inspiration, passion and determination of the authors. Let's support them. I suggest an Authors, Artists, and Small Publishers living wage, sufficient to cover living costs of authors to enable them to work full time on their writing. I also suggest a Publishers Subsidy to support and subsidise publishing in Australia, in the same way that other industries have been subsidised. Literature and the arts are essential for emotional health and communication, for culture and developing and understanding individual and national identity, but the situation has become so difficult in Australia that the mental health of

many writers and artists has tragically been decimated (not aided by the pandemic). Many writers cannot write as much as they would if they were being supported with a living wage. There is an urgent need to support authors with a living wage, to enable them to work at their full capacity and to show appreciation for the invaluable literary work they do.

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' and artists' work, invest in the creative economy and enjoy the cultural, social, educational, health and economic dividends that follow.

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

Roll out a 'Living Wage' scheme for authors, and artists

Enable libraries to proactively promote and display self-publishing authors, local self-authors and small presses

Subsidise publishers, not forgetting small, micro and self-publishers

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

Yours sincerely,

*Dr Ruth Skilbeck*