

Office for the Arts
Department of Infrastructure Transport, Regional Development, Communications and the Arts
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National Cultural Policy Submission
Susan Johnson
Artist (author)

Public submission (permission to use my name)

The centrality of the artist:

I am a published author, who has been continuously published since 1986, when University of Queensland Press published *LATITUDES: NEW WRITING FROM THE NORTH*, which I co edited and in which I published my first fiction.

My first novel, *MESSAGES FROM CHAOS*, was published the following year. I have now published nine novels and four non fiction books, plus my work has been collected in numerous anthologies. My work has been long listed or short listed for awards including the Miles Franklin, the Stella Prize, the National Biography Award and the International Dublin Literary Award, amongst others.

Yet despite critical recognition and an unbroken record of publication over more than 35 years, my most recent publication (a memoir, *A DAUGHTER, A MOTHER AND A GREEK ISLAND*, forthcoming 2023 by Allen and Unwin) would not have met its publication deadline without the critical financial support of funding from the Literature Board of the Australia Council. I needed funds both in order to meet my costs of living – a roof over my head and food in my mouth but also to provide the gift of time. Without funding, I would have had to return to other employment which would have delayed the writing of the book by several years.

As it happened, the \$17,000 grant I received last year as an individual artist, allowed me to complete the book and deliver it to my publisher. The remaining money I am owed contractually from my publisher (advances are paid in three lump sums: one third on signature of the contract, one third on delivery of manuscript, and one third on publication) remains outstanding. I delivered my manuscript in the first week of July, 2022, and it is now the second last week in August, 2022, and I still have not been paid for the manuscript's delivery. This is hardly unusual but part of the reality of the financial life of a working writer in Australia (and I would be regarded by outsiders as one of Australia's more successful, in that I am still published and have books in print and in circulation in libraries and bookshops, yet I am still financially reliant on the mercy of winning grants). Writers get no holiday pay, sick pay or superannuation and rely on other work, annual PLR/ELR payments and whatever small sums earned from their writing. It is critical that digital rights be added to PLR/ELR because it is a scandal that authors do not receive remuneration for this work.

As the recipient of another individual arts grant in 1985 which allowed me to leave other employment and write my first novel, I am still an established novelist unable to earn a living wage without the assistance of arts funding. While I am not a celebrated Australian author such as Tim Winton or Richard Flanagan (who have reached a wider audience through winning major

prizes) I represent a section of minor Australian novelists who nonetheless have contributed books representing the Australian people and it's culture in all its multiplicity. A culture is built by everyone who contributes to it and authors are at the heart of our national culture and since direct funding for authors has fallen significantly, Australia risks losing the next generation of authors if they are not supported.

Perhaps the value of the arts to Australia was more keenly felt than ever over the last few years of Covid lockdowns, when people turned to stories more than ever. I urge the new Labour government to be visionary and far reaching in establishing a cultural policy that includes and supports the working lives of creators. I remain grateful for the support I have had and only hope more young writers coming up have the chance to contribute to our culture. Support is urgently needed.

Thank you
Yours sincerely
Susan Johnson