

National Cultural Policy Submission

Professor Sarah Holland-Batt SFHEA FQA

The Hon. Tony Burke MP, Minister for the Arts

Dear Minister Burke,

Background

I am a poet, editor, and critic, and a Professor of Creative Writing and Literary Studies. My four books have been shortlisted for or won many national awards, including the Prime Minister's Literary Award for Poetry in 2016. I have spent much of my career advocating for the value of reading and writing poetry, and have also written a weekly column focussing on these topics in *The Weekend Australian*. I have served in many roles across the literature sector, including as a judge of the Prime Minister's Literary Awards, and a Peer of the Australia Council for the Arts, and am presently Chair of *Australian Book Review*, although I write this submission in a personal capacity.

I have been fortunate to receive support from the Australia Council in the form of several grants, and a literature residency at the B.R. Whiting Studio Library in Rome. It is hard to overestimate the value of this support at every stage of my career. I have also received support from international organisations including Yaddo and MacDowell Artists Colonies in the United States, and have represented Australia at literary festivals in Germany, Spain, England, Scotland, Mexico, Argentina, Nicaragua, Indonesia and elsewhere.

Recommendations and Rationale:

I write to advocate for a renewed policy focus on, funding for, and visibility of literature within the overall National Cultural Policy framework. In particular, I encourage you to:

- 1) Establish and fund the long-overdue position of a Poet Laureate of Australia to enhance the visibility of Australian poetry both at home and abroad, bringing Australia in line with the U.K., the United States, Canada, New Zealand and countless other nations around the world which recognise poetry's preeminence as a literary artform and its role in public life. Recognising outstanding contributions to the artform, the role of Poet Laureate should be a three-year term, remunerated at \$100k p.a., with a broad remit to both engage the Australian public with poetry, and to champion Australian poetry abroad. It should be administered by the National Library of Australia, and selected by an council of experts in poetry;
- 2) Dramatically increase the overall budget of the Australia Council, and in particular, the proportion of Australia Council funding set aside for literature (currently a mere 4% of the Australia Council's annual budget) so that literature is funded at the same level as other artforms such as a music and dance. The present levels of funding for literature are broadly interpreted within the sector as signalling neglect, disdain and an ideological hostility towards literature; it is imperative that any new cultural policy framework rectifies this, and offers a

greater voice for literature within arts policy, as well as a proportionate budget share;

- 3) Develop a scheme of 5-year grants for small-to-medium literary organisations to offer established organisations greater continuity and certainty in a funding landscape presently dominated by short-term 1-2 year grant cycles. A grant round focussed on 5-year funding will enable literary organisations to develop and deliver ambitious medium and long-term plans, which are presently too often lacking across the sector;
- 4) Address the precarious, unsustainable working conditions Australian writers endure by removing income taxation on literary prizes and grants; establishing minimum industry rates of pay for writers, and making future federal funding of literary organisations contingent on meeting these rates; and expanding the PLR scheme to include digital lending rights; and
- 5) Establish an ongoing annual stipend for 500 Australian writers of \$20,000 – based on the model of the Aosdána in Ireland, whereby a governing council of writers elect members based on their outstanding contributions to literature – in order to offer a modicum of stability and security to writers, and recognise the necessary and essential contributions they make to our intellectual and cultural life.

Thank you for your consideration of these suggestions, and for the opportunity to contribute to this process.

Yours faithfully



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