

National Cultural Policy Submission

Rick Morton

Submitted: As an artist

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Submission re: A New National Cultural Policy

Rick Morton

I am a writer and making this submission principally as an author published in Australia. It will likely come as no surprise that I am most concerned about how it is that artists are meant to *live* when there are so few avenues for paid or supported work in this nation. And the pay that is provided is so deeply inadequate.

Others will no doubt make this point better than me (I have many deadlines, almost none of which involve actual creative writing, as I must support myself and have little time to focus on submissions of this nature) but the failure to support a diverse range of artists from different cultures and socio-economic backgrounds is a significant failure of nationhood. We've told the same stories for a long time now. Frequently, it is the same people who get access to the cultural opportunities that are available. There is nothing wrong with those people or stories. Equally, there is nothing wrong with the others and yet we don't see those.

Now, a guaranteed way to produce the same outcomes is to maintain the conditions of the status quo. Artists with financial support from a partner or their family will continue to make art. They may do so in isolation if we cannot support an arts industry that sees the work we do as *work*.

I'm not a scholar in this area but recently my attention has turned to this subject simply because I would love nothing more than to write my next book, fiction, but find it almost impossible to take the time required to even do a bad job at it. I don't come from a wealthy or even a connected family. I come from a poor one, from regional Queensland. Most of my adult life has been spent making sure I earn enough money in my day job to make sure my family is OK. I'm lucky that I've made it this far, to be honest. I'm lucky that I have a job that hasn't completely cruelled by artistic instinct.

But, as Helen Garner wrote in her submission to this review, writing isn't just about sitting down in front of a computer and arranging words. It's about the *thinking* that informs those compositions. In my 30s, there is precious little time for thinking. It's all I can do to keep my head above water with the paid projects I have taken on (not writing, necessarily) to be able to contribute something in the cultural space with what little energy I have left.

You might argue that my contribution is not worth it. That might be true, of course, but what about everyone else from a background that guarantees it is harder to become an artistic success story? It's not possible to reject them all. Arts funding has not kept pace with

living on practically any measure. We cannot continue this way and expect the shape and nature of the national story to reflect who we are. It would break the laws of physics.

As someone who grew up with a library card and cherished it for what it made available – a world – it is most excellent that authors are paid some income for lending and borrowing schemes in Australia. For many, it is more money than they might see in royalties. We can do better. Encouraging library use is the best of our instincts for it acknowledges the people for whom the library is an affordable solace. It would be a virtuous circle if authors were compensated more generously as a result.

Grants and residencies are also incredibly important, though there are too few opportunities and the quantum of funding small in comparison to decades previous. There are no doubt more innovative solutions out there, brought by minds sharper than my own. The constant fight for survival has made my brain somewhat gelatinous, you see.

What I came here to say is really an urging: this stuff matters.

Thank you,

Rick Morton