

## **Submission to a new National Cultural Policy**

Submission from:

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With submissions limited to three pages, I will focus on several actions that might be taken to enable the writing and publishing industry to thrive. If requested, I can provide further information regarding background, context, evidence and the importance of Australian writing to Australian culture and society.

### Funding authors

The 44% reduction in literature funding by the Australia Council since 2013 in no way reflects the value of Australian writing, and it reduces opportunities for writers to create new work, to develop their craft and to continue their careers. Each funding round, only a minority of the many meritorious applications are able to be supported. A nation that values its stories supports its storytellers.

By comparison, the Irish Arts Council runs a grants program that provides a notable breadth and depth of funding, including the Cnuas, a five year-year bursary with scope for renewal. This is an explicit recognition that, even for many artists whose contribution is significant to the nation, full-time pursuit of their art cannot feasibly be supported through income from creative practice alone. It allows funded artists to set aside other work and focus on their creative output. In 2020, fifty-one Irish authors were receiving the Cnuas. Per head of population, that would be the equivalent of 260 Australian writers receiving a modest but reliable income to allow them to write full-time. Australia should consider a similar scheme.

### Lending Rights

Public Lending Right and Educational Lending Right compensate authors for earnings foregone when readers borrow books from libraries (public and educational libraries respectively) instead of buying them. Authors support libraries and the work they do to make books available and connect them with readers, and welcome these lending rights schemes. PLR and ELR payments are made in June each year and based on the number

of copies held in libraries, with surveys leading to an estimate of the national holdings of each book, and payment made for each copy held. Enhancing these schemes offers a possible alternative to an equivalent of the Irish Cnuas for supporting mid-career mid-list authors. A significant increase (a doubling or greater) of the per-book payment made for the first 20,000 copies of an author's works in each scheme could provide mid-career authors with additional funding, while administratively requiring only a straightforward change to the calculations made in the existing program.

Additionally, a Digital Lending Right, payable on copies of ebooks and audiobooks held by libraries, should be added to the suite of lending rights. The UK introduced such a scheme in 2018. Libraries' digital holdings are increasing, and failure to capture digital works in existing lending rights schemes can see author lending rights incomes fall even as library holdings of their work increase.

### Libraries

Since 1965, the Norwegian government has run a scheme called *Innkjøpsordningen*, designed to support Norwegian literary culture by buying a designated number of copies of Norwegian books from trade publishers and distributing them to libraries. The government currently buys 773 copies of each adult novel and 1550 copies of each children's book. According to the Norwegian Ministry of Culture, 'The model has three benefits: the authors are better paid for their books through the sale of more copies, the publishers are able to take the risk of publishing books by unknown authors thanks to a guaranteed minimum sale, and the public libraries can make a full year of new Norwegian fiction available for free loan to all readers'.

The Norwegian scheme, if applied here per head of population, would be the equivalent of the Australian government buying more than 3,500 copies of each Australian adult novel and more than 7,000 copies of each children's book. The impact would be dramatic, and potentially far greater than it is in Norway. A print run of 3,000 copies makes a book viable to publish and promote. Currently, many worthy books are not published because publishers see limited prospects of them getting enough attention in a crowded marketplace to sell close to this figure. A guaranteed government purchase of 3,500 copies would take the risk out of publishing many books, see many more first-

time authors given a chance and many more mid-list authors continuing to publish and continuing to develop their craft and audience.

Other library-based initiatives could also be valuable. Libraries could be given additional support to run writing and reading programs. These could include workshops for young people and adults, and an events program to connect authors and books with readers. This could be part of a larger national program to identify and highlight the benefits of reading, and to offer specific strategies for people to meet the widely expressed interest of incorporating reading more into their lives.

#### Authors in schools and other institutions

Australia already has a number of booking agencies that book authors into schools. Well-resourced (often non-government) capital city schools tend to have the best access to authors, since they have the funds to hire them. Government involvement could see the rollout of a scheme that would put more authors in schools more often, and level the playing field. This would provide more income for authors, facilitate among the students a deeper connection with books, reading and storytelling, and provide fresh expert input into the teaching of the craft of writing. As the Irish government does, the Australian government could provide subsidies for author visits.

Schemes might also be developed to place authors in places such as prisons and hospitals.

#### Incentives for film/TV/streaming producers

With more screen content required than ever before to meet the demands of streaming services, Australian books provide stories that have already gone through a rigorous selection process and the value-add of editing. Enhancing the incentives for producers to adapt Australian book content for the screen would improve author incomes (both through exercising adaptation rights and through increased book sales), create more work for cast crew and supporting companies, and make more Australian stories available on screen for both domestic and international consumers.