

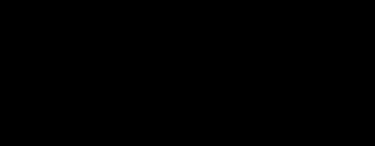
National Cultural Policy Submission

Submitted: As an individual

Page 1

National Cultural Policy Submission

Lisa Hill, 'Ambassador for Australian Literature'



I am submitting this submission as an individual — as a reader.

Authors, editors, cover designers and publishers: they all have vested interests, but we readers, we are stakeholders too. We are the ones they're producing the books for.

We are the ones that want Australian books to read, to hear ourselves and to see our landscapes and cityscapes on the page. We want to read themes that express our own unique joys, our concerns, and our existential threats. We need to read non-fiction that interrogates our history both black and white; that educates us about our flora, fauna and geoscapes; and that informs us about *our* politics, *our* foreign affairs, and *our* disasters such as fire and flood. We want biographies — not just best-sellers about sporting heroes, but about people of enduring significance. Naturally, we readers want biographies and literary criticism about our great writers.

We want access to these books to be affordable and we want them to be available in libraries across the country, including properly funded school libraries, staffed by knowledgeable teacher-librarians in primary schools. And we don't just want shiny new books, we also want access to our literary heritage to be protected with incentives for backlists to remain in print once their authors have passed away. We want old texts that are not commercially viable to be available for anyone to read online through initiatives like Gutenberg Australia and Trove, and we want the originals accessible for scholars and researchers through properly funded archives.

We also want to read the work of our multicultural community. Inclusivity also means funding for Australian authors whose first language is not English, not to write memoirs in English language classes, but to write confidently in their own languages and have them translated for the market¹.

But we don't just want the books, we want the author talks and literary events that feature Australian writers, and while we enjoy the publicity events, we also want more in-depth events such as the Wheeler Centre's 'Late Great' series which educated a new generation of enthusiasts

¹ For example, Shokoofeh Azar's novel *The Enlightenment of the Greengage Tree* was written in Persian, translated into English, and published by a very small publisher, Wild Dingo Press. It was nominated for the National Book Award for Translated Literature, the PEN Translation Prize, the Adelaide Festival Award, the Stella Prize and the International Booker.

National Cultural Policy Submission

Submitted: As an individual

Page 2

about our literary heritage with panels discussing the work of writers such our only Nobel Laureate Patrick White.

We love literary tourism. We'd like to enjoy it here as well as overseas, and we'd like to be able to brag about a LitTourism itinerary to our international lit-loving friends. We want literary trails that explore the literary history of our cities and our regions, and we want these to be *visible*, not just accessible via some App. So we need plaques on buildings like the blue ones in London, and, why not? we also want author statues². Commissioning statues of our important authors is creative work for sculptors too.

(Seriously, grass (i.e., the Patrick White Lawn in Canberra) is no substitute for a statue of our only Nobel Laureate.)

Plus, we want OzLit taught in schools and universities so that other people will learn to cherish it too, and that means it needs to be specified in the National Curriculum and university degree programs, and those who teach it need to have some serious expertise in our literary heritage and the contemporary scene.

While not denying the important role of global publishers in supporting commercial fiction and non-fiction, it is the Small Publishing Network which now provides the most interesting and most innovative Australian titles. We want support for small and micro publishers who are the ones who take a risk. Least able to sustain small print and potentially unprofitable runs, they are nevertheless the publishers who bring us books that celebrate diversity in all its forms.

How do I know that this is what we want? Because I am the award-winning LitBlogger³ behind ANZLitLovers.com, which is dedicated to reviews of Australian literary fiction, some non-fiction and an annual First Nations Reading Week⁴. I know it because my blog has over a million-and-a-

² [Memorial to Alan Marshall outside Sandringham Library; Reynolds, Pauline; 1988; ... on eHive](#)

³ Background: I grew up reading what was available to me as a middle-class reader born in the 50s: British literature, the classics and the Victorian Readers. Even though I have been a voracious reader since childhood, until the 1980s I had little exposure to contemporary Australian literature even at university majoring in English for my BA.

⁴ I have hosted a First Nations Reading Week during NAIDOC Week every year since 2012, with my reviews and those harvested from participants to create the [ANZLL First Nations Literature Reading List | ANZ LitLovers LitBlog](#). It is a resource list for school and university libraries in Australia, and has had nearly 10,000

National Cultural Policy Submission

Submitted: As an individual

Page 3

half hits, averaging hundreds of hits per day and thousands each month. Through interactive blog comments, people are in conversation with me about books every day.

The author Roger McDonald gave me the moniker ‘Ambassador for Australian Literature’ because my reviews are read around the world, not just by expat Australians but by international readers around the globe. I know that my reviews are reputable and have credibility because they are recommended to students and staff in schools and tertiary institutions, including some overseas. Publishers all over Australia send me books for review — more than I can possibly read though I review about 200 books each year — and they do this because they know the contribution that I have made with nearly 15 years of voluntary work promoting Australian literature.

To the best of my knowledge there is no other permanent First Nations reading list review website, that adds new titles as they become available. (I don’t know of any other Australian review site that includes reviewing of titles from neighbours in our region i.e., Southeast Asia, which is important too.)

In recognition of the work that I do and how it is valued by Australian publishers and authors, I was nominated for the 2021 Australian of the Year Award, and my site is recognised as a resource for students of Australian literature at Australian schools and universities, and also at least one tertiary institution that I know of in the US.

Reaching the Audience

I am 70 this year. I won’t be able to keep up the blog forever, and as in other areas of volunteering there are no successors in sight. There are few opportunities for the next generation to hone their skills with paid work in this field. Reviewers of Australian literature need to be *very* widely-read, aware of trends here and overseas, and open to reading innovative and experimental books, not just the latest crime fiction or diversity memoir. Inclusivity also means having expertise in the literature and history of countries from whom our multicultural communities derive, so that there is context for the writing of migrants and refugees⁵. However, it should be noted that my blog is widely read because it is *not* academic in tone or content.

The Copyright Agency funds some reviewing, but it’s not enough, and funding reviews in print such as *The Australian* and the *Australian Book Review* journal means that those reviews are only accessible to people who pay to read a declining print medium. There needs to be support

views as of the date of writing. My review of Lyndall Ryan’s *Tasmanian Aborigines, a history since 1803* has been viewed over 16,000 times.

⁵ For example, Shokoofeh Azar’s internationally notable *The Enlightenment of the Greengage Tree* is both a tribute to classical Persian storytelling and an appropriate response to the madness of the life in Iran that she fled.

National Cultural Policy Submission

Submitted: As an individual

Page 4

for book reviewing on a 21st century medium that reaches people who never read a review in print. The industry can't expect that reviews at Amazon or Goodreads will be adequate.

I apologise for not segmenting my submission using your 'pillars'. I am out of practice at writing submissions, I write from the heart.