

# National Cultural Policy Submission

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## Submission on National Cultural Policy

I've been a full-time writer for around six years, and I'm the author of three published novels (*Wimmera*, *The Rip* and *The Others*), in addition to short pieces published and broadcast in various places.

Like many authors, the path to my chosen career took many turns. Growing up in country Victoria, the idea of being an author seemed very far-fetched. So I took a pragmatic approach with my university studies, and then worked in government for a number of years.

Eventually, I decided to take the risk and leave my career to write creatively.

Since that decision, I've been lucky to enjoy some modest critical and commercial success. But in a small market like Australia, my life as a writer remains financially precarious.

If I relied on royalties and advances alone, it would be difficult to cover living expenses. So in addition to appearance fees and freelance work, I rely on funding from competitive grant programs. Without the occasional grant, there would be little chance I could continue to write.

When I worked in government, policies and projects were almost always assessed primarily through an economic lens. In the arts, we (reluctantly) try to justify ourselves using the same metrics. But the impact of the arts, and writing in particular, is deeper than what the numbers might show.

Our cultural fabric is made up of many things, but good writing is essential to understanding our contemporary identity and place in the world. It is crucial that stories about Australia continue to be written, published, and performed.

I can remember in high school being required to read *Summer of the Seventeenth Doll* by Ray Lawler. This play, written some forty years prior and set in inner-Melbourne, was far removed from my day-to-day life. But it was also one of the first serious books I'd read about places I recognised. It had an enormous impact on me, and gave me a sense that Australian stories mattered.

I understand governments have immense responsibilities and many competing priorities. But investment in the arts, and in particularly in literature, shouldn't be an afterthought. I would like to see a modest living wage provided to artists as a pilot program, as has been implemented in Ireland. It would be a decisive move, and one that would reap dividends in creative output for years to come.

At the very least, I would hope to see a substantial increase in funding to the Australia Council, especially for literature. While I've benefited from their grants in the past, I've also seen the other side of the process as a peer assessor. In that role, I witnessed a significant number of worthy projects go unfunded. It's a very small pie, and extraordinarily competitive – increasing the pool of funding allocated to literature would deliver significant and long-lasting benefits to the creative and cultural sector.

The PLR/ELR scheme should also be extended to include digital formats. The current scheme is highly valued by authors, but reflects an outdated understanding of library collections. Now is the time for it to be updated.

Lastly, I would like commonwealth grants and literary prizes to be treated as exempt from income tax. This small change would mean a great deal to writers, and would increase the impact of current investment in the arts.

Thank you for taking the time to read my submission.

Yours sincerely,

Mark Brandi