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Submission re: the National Cultural Policy 2022
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Thank you for the opportunity to contribute to the formation of a National Cultural policy. It is genuinely exciting to be able to be part of this process and to see attention being paid to this neglected and struggling sector.

I am the author of two novels, *The Service of Clouds* and *The Lost Thoughts of Soldiers*, and two book-length works of nonfiction, *Sydney* and *Signs and Wonders*, which have between them attracted various grants, shortlistings and national prizes across the categories of fiction, nonfiction, history, research, innovation, and biography. I have also worked since 1997 as a peer assessor and mentor for grants programs, including those of the Australia Council, National Library of Australia, Varuna: the National Writers' House, and the Australian Society of Authors. I have lectured for 17 years in the Creative Writing Program at UTS, where I am in contact with emerging authors and industry guests. I write to you in this instance as an individual artist.

I would welcome a National Cultural Policy that gives far greater support to writers and the publishing industry and to the broader culture and institutions that sustain it.

The publishing sector is suffering, in Monash University researcher Ben Eltham's words, from years of 'grinding austerity'. <https://theconversation.com/australian-writing-and-publishing-faces-grinding-austerity-as-funding-continues-to-decline-179476>.

While costs of living have risen and COVID has disrupted many opportunities for writers to earn, the national arts portfolio budget has continued contracting, decreasing by 19% this year. Within this poorly-funded sector, Eltham observes, *literature is particularly poorly funded*, receiving only 2.4% of the funding pie. In 2020-21 the Australia Council allocated only \$4.7 million to literature compared to \$120 million for the major performing arts organisations — even though our publishing industry arguably does much more in terms of representing Australia to itself and the world. In my observation, the long-term drying up of literature funding has impacted most disastrously on those smaller organisations (such as writers' centres and small magazines) that are the *crucial incubators* of new writing and have shown the most inspiring leadership in terms of fostering a lively, diverse, literary culture for writers while growing audiences for literature.

In addition, a recent Australian Society of Authors survey found that 53.6% of Australian writers earn on average less than \$15,000 per year, and 23.2% earn on average less than \$2000.

This neglect has taken place within a cultural context in which literature, the arts, cultural institutions, and the universities (especially humanities) have been consistently devalued in government communications.

With this context in mind, my requests are that the government, in developing arts policy:

1. Adopts, as much as possible, an 'arm's length' cultural policy, with the understanding that much of the infrastructure, expertise, and will is already in place in the sector and that an instant and significant increase in funding to writers and to existent organisations will be the fastest route to reviving Australia's literary and publishing ecology. Rather than "reinventing the wheel" by reduplicating the role of the Australia Council or concentrating on "big picture" initiatives (such as the failed Book Council of Australia), policy should concentrate first on giving greater autonomy and funding to the expert infrastructure that is already in place.
2. Immediately increases funding significantly to the Australia Council, which already has the expertise and gold standard judging processes in place (such as judging criteria and protocols for recruiting culturally and geographically diverse peer assessors) to get support swiftly to individual writers, publishers and to organisations. (It has been devastating to sit as a peer in Australia Council judging rounds to see only a couple of dozen projects at most funded out of the 200 or so mostly excellent and fundable projects in each round).
3. Recognises the importance of smaller organisations like writers' centres and literary journals etc, as the part of the literary ecosystem that is already doing much of the essential work of designing and delivering programs that foster diversity and innovation. Increased budgeting to the Australia Council will ensure the flow of money, via peer assessment and consultation, to these organisations, which have been dealing with tremendous instability, with many on the verge of closing operations entirely over the last two years. Without the futurity that 3-year funding allows, others have had to concentrate on surviving rather than being able to develop their excellent programs.
4. Works with the Australia council to create a national plan or funding framework specific to literature, similar to those already in place for the performing arts, visual arts and crafts. While remaining at arm's length in terms of funding decisions, such a plan needs to define the priorities for the sector over the medium to long-term and must be accompanied by *locked-in multi-year funding specific to the literary sector*.
5. Acts urgently to extend its Publication Lending Right (PLR) and Education Lending Right (ELR) schemes to include digital rights. Currently, audiobooks are one of the fastest-growing parts of publishing and these are not covered by the current Lending Rights Schemes. Electronic books now constitute a significant share of library borrowing, also not included. Within the university sector, *all* the required reading we assign to students is digital. At present this mechanism that was invented to compensate writers for the use of their writing is not performing a significant part of its function. These payments often constitute a significant part of writers' incomes.

6. Removes tax on grants and prizes to writers.
7. Recognises that literature should not be addressed at an industrial level only, but with an understanding that for it to be healthy our literary cultural heritage also needs to be protected, promoted, and cherished. For our literature to function, institutions such as libraries and universities also need to be healthy. Policy formulation needs to address their diminishment by decades of austerity measures, which have put them in such a precarious position that they have had to concentrate on short-term measures to ensure their own survival rather than being able to lead via long-term vision and planning. This wider understanding would aim to significantly increase funding to institutions such as the National Library and National Archives and to universities; in particular, humanities and communications degrees. In the shorter term, our new cultural policy needs to vigorously reject the Morrison government's 2020 claim that arts degrees don't "lead to jobs" and are thus of little value and to reverse the disastrous doubling of costs for humanities degrees.
8. Takes the lead from Ireland's proposed Culture 2025 initiative, which recognises that 'protecting and promoting Ireland's natural habitats and biodiversity' is also essential to a healthy arts sector. A truly visionary arts policy might consider not only the ways in which looking after country (with First Nations leadership) is essential to enriching our culture but also the ways in which Australia might take the lead on the world stage around questions of environmental protection and futurity.
9. Thinks boldly about tackling financial insecurity for authors. While it is vital to support the institutions mentioned above, this does not address the longer-term precarity of many authors' lives; perhaps most particularly among those writers who have had the benefit of support for a first project but then are left to their own devices. I would strongly encourage the government to consider the Australian Society of Author's suggested 3-year program to roll out a 'Living Wage' program in Australia, similar to Ireland's Basic Income for the Arts (BIA) scheme.
10. Recognises the importance of literature and the arts more broadly as a fundamental cornerstone of our nation, of benefit to all Australians, and accessible by all.

Thank you for considering this submission. I am happy for it to be made public.

Yours faithfully,

Dr Delia Falconer

