

# **National Cultural Policy Submission**

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## **Introduction**

Australian creators on a purely economic level are as important as other primary producers: farmers, miners, manufacturers. The creative industries employ many hundreds of thousands of people, are significant exporters of intellectual property, and are a major part of the economy we measure in dollars.

But Australian creators not only add to the economic wealth of the nation, they also add to our collective spiritual and narrative worth. This is not quantifiable in dollars or number of jobs, but it is as important, particularly in the long term. A nation without its own creators, without its own creations, has no independent cultural future.

I am specifically going to address writing and publishing because I have been a writer most of my life. My first story was published in 1982 when I was 19; my first book in 1991 when I was 27. Now, at almost 60, I have had more than 40 books published in Australia, the USA, the UK; and they have been translated into more than 40 languages. I have also worked as a bookseller, a book sales representative, a book publicist, a book editor and a literary agent. I am an Australian creator, and I am an Australian-based exporter of intellectual property.

## **In the Beginning, There was the Word**

Writing is a foundational art. Apart from the direct creation of prose and poetry which is the raw material of publishing, many other creative enterprises begin with writing, including film, television and theatre. Yet writing is sometimes forgotten as being the progenitor of these finished products. Supporting writers also supports these collaborative artforms which are often more visible cultural products.

## **Contrary to Belief, Very Few Authors are Rich**

It is often not realised that the vast majority of books – including those published by the major multinationals – are not profitable and many only break even. Publishing is a low profit, low margin business and is sustained by the very small percentage of books that do become big bestsellers and/or perennials. This flows back to authors, of course, very few of whom make much money. Even authors who are moderately well known and have a number of books visible in bookstores may not make the minimum wage on an annual basis. This is particularly true of authors whose books do not travel outside our relatively smaller domestic market.

This is often forgotten because the *potential* upside for any book is enormous. Anything can happen, including international bestsellerdom, screen adaptation and so on. We all know about these books, because they are the most visible. But they are a tiny minority.

The great challenge of writing and publishing is that *every book is a new product* and its future uncertain. No amount of authorial work, frenetic social media, publisher's marketing or anything else can *guarantee* a book will sell. Writing and publishing a book are leaps of faith. Even for well-established authors, a new book will not necessarily gain the same economic rewards as the last one, in fact often they will not. And books that might be very important for cultural or intellectual reasons may not ever be big sellers, but can have a profound effect on the people they do reach, and on our society.

## **What can the Australian Government do to support Australian authors and publishers?**

I completely support the submission made by the Australian Society of Authors, which identifies many areas where government can make a significant difference. My comments below are supplementary to those made in the ASA submission.

## **Beginning authors need accurate advice and actual expertise**

The challenges for beginning writers typically revolve around learning their craft, trying to find out about the business, and getting published for the first time or learning how to successfully self-publish. Many, many Australians want to write, to improve their craft, and to learn about how to be published. There is a great deal of misinformation online, there are predatory scams, and relatively few trusted providers of useful information, resources and connections.

- Increase funding to the organisations that give practical advice, run workshops and offer opportunities to learn and network to writers, specifically the professional associations (the Australian Society of Authors and the Australian Writers Guild) and the various state-based Writer's Centres.

## **Authors need time (which means money) to write**

It is very rare for a first book to effectively launch the career of an author. More frequently it is a second, third or later book that works, and also lifts up the previous books. But those later books may not get written or published, because the harsh economics of the (short-term focussed) market means a publisher may not take another chance if the first book is not immediately successful. What great works do we lose because authors simply cannot afford to live *and* write, or who are not given another chance to be published if they do miraculously manage to write?

- Direct grants, living wage schemes, tax-free literary prizes, and expansion of the very important PLR/ELR program to include ebooks as per the ASA submission. Also particular attention is needed to those who are disadvantaged and have additional barriers to accessing time to write and the chance to be published.
- Funding to Australian publishers specifically to assist in the publication of 2<sup>nd</sup>, 3<sup>rd</sup>, 4<sup>th</sup>, 5<sup>th</sup> or later books. There is often desire from editors to continue publishing an author, but if the first book sales are poor, this is countermanded by sales and marketing.

## **A Level Playing Field**

Maintenance of the Australian copyright territory is essential for Australian authors and publishers. Much has been written about this for various enquiries over the last twenty-five years (including by me). To forestall it, let me reiterate that as long as the behemoths of English language publishing, that is the USA and the UK, maintain their copyright territories, removing Australia's equivalent territorial protections would have the effect of gifting the Australian publishing industry and the chance of Australian authors to be published in their own country to New York and London.

Because Australia maintains its own copyright territory, I have been able to make *separate* deals for each of my books with Australian, US and UK publishers, which is enormously beneficial for an author and the foundation for me to earn a good living as a writer for many decades (coupled with the luck I mentioned earlier).

Because I was lucky, I've never sought or received any direct government assistance via the Australia Council grants system or similar. But I completely support these programs. Having time to write and the chance to be published shouldn't need luck.

I have benefited from the very important PLR and ELR programs. These payments are of particular importance to authors in mid-career or later, who may have many copies of their books in libraries still being widely read, but who do not have new work being published. Though often they are still writing, stymied by the barriers I have mentioned.

## **Conclusion**

I could write much more, but I am grateful for this opportunity. I hope the submissions to this new policy will result in careful, deep thought about the importance of Australian creators and Australian creative industries; and the government will enact policies and programs to create an environment for all Australians to have the opportunity to realise their creative potential, and to support and revitalise Australian creative industries.