

National Cultural Policy Submission

Nicole Abadee

Submitted: As an individual

First, I am grateful that the Labor government is planning to develop a new National Cultural Policy. This is a great step forward. I am also grateful for the opportunity to make a submission.

My submission is based on over 10 years of experience in the book industry – first as a senior editor at Penguin Random House, then in the last 7 years as a festival moderator, books writer (currently for Good Weekend Magazine, out on a Saturday with the Sydney Morning Herald and The Age, and previously for the Australian Financial Review Magazine) and podcaster. In my previous career I was a lawyer for 20 years, 10 as a barrister.

I am happy for my submission to be included on the website.

I wholeheartedly endorse the call by the Australia Council for a higher level of investment in Australian literature.

I have never met a more talented, hard-working and creative group of people than those I have met in the book industry – in particular the writers, whose average annual earnings from their writing (according to the latest figures) is less than \$13 000. This is shameful and needs to be remedied – perhaps by legally enshrining a right for authors to be paid a fair or equitable price for their work, as is done in other countries, such as Germany and the Netherlands.

I am very disappointed to learn that federal investment in literature has declined by more than 40 percent in the last decade, with only \$5 million allocated in 2021/2022 through the Australia Council. I cannot understand why the level of funding for literature should be lower than it is for other art forms. There is a huge thirst for Australian writing, which has only grown during the pandemic. There are so many

extraordinarily talented writers working today, across a range of genres, and they deserve better.

I understand that the Australia Council is proposing a co-ordinated model of funding between State and federal governments, guided by a National Reading & Writing Framework. Given that Literature is currently the only major art form without a cohesive approach to sustainable funding and industry development I am all in favour of this.

I am also in favour of reform of Public Lending Rights and Educational Lending Rights to include ebooks and audiobooks – this is obviously an oversight that needs to be remedied.

I also support the call for greater Government investment – through residencies, training programs, exhibitions and other initiatives - to raise the profile of Australian writers and their work overseas.

Finally, a small note based on my personal experience. As a regular moderator at writers' festivals, which are a wonderful showcase for the work of Australian writers and attract large crowds of enthusiastic supporters, I am paid between \$200- \$350 per session. It takes me anything from 2-4 days' of work to prepare for each session. This is not a fair payment.

This is not the fault of the festivals, who operate hand-to-mouth on a shoestring budget, and have suffered enormously due to COVID 19. I would urge the Government to make more funding available to writers' festivals so that they can pay moderators and writers a more equitable amount.

Thank you again for the opportunity to make a submission to this critically important initiative.

Best wishes, Nicole

Nicole Abadee

Books writer. Festival moderator. Podcaster.