

National Cultural Policy Submission

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Submission may be made public**

A robust cultural policy would acknowledge that access to art and culture is a fundamental right, as enshrined in Article 27 of the UN Declaration of Human Rights, to which Australia is a signatory. A cultural policy would move art and culture beyond its institutional niches and advance investment in arts and culture through other institutions including health and education, establishing and defending the public value of arts and culture from early childhood to tertiary institutions and through adult education opportunities, **directly employing artists** at every step. A robust National Cultural Policy will acknowledge that art and culture are an ecosystem, and that most opportunities for participation happen at the local level, via small to medium arts organisations, and direct resources to these levels appropriately. Any restoration or increase in funding must restore the balance, as well as directing core funds to those who need it most — our independent artists and writers.

The establishment of a Ministry of Culture should be the foundational plank of a new Cultural Policy, reversing the subsuming of arts and culture into other departments. The arts should be at the heart of a culture portfolio that draws elements currently scattered around the cabinet table together, as with models in the UK, EU and Canada. A culture ministry would facilitate the aggregation of federal spending across areas such as arts, heritage, broadcasting, national collecting institutions, games, heritage, digital media, film and television and so forth. A Ministry of Culture would have the authority to add its voice to the discourse of public good, along with health and education.

Supporting Australian writers

Better support and conditions for Australian writers: Australian writers operate in a climate of profound precarity. The flawed ‘creative industries’ model has failed to deliver anything but poverty for working writers. Writers are forced to adopt a small business, fee-for-service model, negotiating every contract individually. Writers have no minimum wage, no access to superannuation or sick leave, and no capacity to bargain collectively. Exploitation is rife and underpayment is the norm. This has devastating consequences for access to culture as well as for culture itself. A new National Cultural Policy must look closely at the ways government can act to directly improve their working conditions. A cultural policy that recognises writers as workers will recognise that **they are entitled to the same rights as other workers:** fair pay, superannuation, leave entitlements, capacity to bargain collectively, and recourse to dispute resolution when conflicts arise. It should ensure that writers are eligible for the same social support benefits as other workers.

All public funding for arts and cultural projects should be contingent on fair pay for the people who make the work. When funding arts organisations, funding bodies must prioritise organisations and projects that directly employ artists in secure work. Alongside the current project-based model, arts funding should investigate and trial better ways of employing writers in more secure forms of work, including a greatly expanded fellowships program and **public employment schemes** such as residencies in schools, literacy and reading initiatives, public libraries, and health care settings.

Digital Lending Rights: For writers, public lending and copyright payments are an essential source of income. It is vital that the PLR/ELR scheme be expanded to include **digital lending rights**, as recommended by the Australian Society of Authors.

Supporting Australian Literature:

A **National Strategy for Literature** should be developed, as already exists for other art forms, to ensure that adequate funding is directed to writers and to literature, and to ensure that Australian literature is sustainable into the future, with institutional support, fair remuneration, and the mandating of Australian content. A Literature Strategy would nurture the creation of Australian stories, while simultaneously helping to embed Australian literature in its regional and global contexts by supporting residencies and other exchanges of writers and academics across the Indo-Pacific region and beyond - and also supporting translation programs that would enable such exchanges.

Education: culture is a vast and distributed network of competencies and awareness that *has to be taught*, from kindergarten up through schools and into tertiary education. **Schools:** The teaching of Australian literature, including prose narratives, poetry and drama, across all levels of the school curriculum should be supported and monitored, with a special focus on First Nations writing. Extra funding should be made available to school libraries to enhance their collections of Australian literature, and the Literature Board should institute residencies by Australian writers in schools, as well as in tertiary institutions. The study of literature should be mandated at all levels of the school curriculum. **Universities:** A robust cultural policy would protect the autonomy of research institutions like universities as safeguards for world-class quality in the Humanities, which then spills over into general cultural literacy and competence. Universities maintain awareness of ‘the tradition’, but also an understanding of what is happening internationally in the arts and letters right now, how the conversation is shifting, and what ‘value’ looks like today. If the culture industries contributed \$63.5 billion to the national economy in 2016-2017, and we wish to maintain or grow that vital tributary to the GDP, then there needs to be guaranteed investment in the highest-level training in cultural/literary awareness. It is that general, distributed understanding that floats the boats of the George Millers of this world; and it is the investment in educational excellence (as well as writers’ grants) that puts Alexis Wright, David Malouf, and Kate Grenville on the ‘quality fiction’ shelves the world over and promotes our cultural reputation. Universities are a critical piece of the puzzle. To this end, the Government should act immediately to **revoke the ‘Jobs ready package’**, a grotesque attempt at social engineering that overcharges students for their degrees in the Arts and Creative Arts. The government should create a **dedicated Chair of Australian Literature in every state and territory** and ensure that the study of Australian literature is available to students at all levels of the undergraduate degree. All students studying to become English teachers should be required to complete a set amount of Australian literature subjects, with a special emphasis on First Nations writing, within their undergraduate degree, thereby equipping them to teach Australian literature when they graduate.

First Nations writing: telling First Nations stories is fundamental to *Makarrata*: truth telling—enshrined in the Uluru Statement from The Heart—as well as healing and reparation. Reading First Nations stories is a powerful way of opening the hearts of other Australians to the ongoing cultures of First Nation Australians and the history of First Nation-settler relations in this country. In order to support the telling of First Nations stories, programs to support First Nations writers should be enhanced, and support should be provided to increase capacity in First Nations literary scholarship.

Australia Council: In order to support better conditions for writers, the funding of the Australia Council for the Arts should be increased and fairly distributed. The arm's length peer review process must be protected from the uncertainty created by changes of government, and a greater proportion of the Council's funding should be directed to support Australian literature. The current Fellowships program (less than 10 a year) should be greatly expanded to support independent artists and writers to sustain their practice, and these Fellowships should pay a living wage.

Australian Content: A robust cultural policy would recognise the essential role played by Australian writers in the production of screen and digital media. The current quotas for Australian content on screen, free to air television and streaming platforms is manifestly inadequate and should be lifted immediately to at least 25% (for comparison, European countries mandate 30% European content). This would have enormous flow on effects, not only to the writers and other creatives involved in production, but in increasing the diversity and breadth of representation of Australian stories. *You can't be what you can't see: representation matters.* This would immediately lift the level of investment in creating Australian content by streaming platforms such as Netflix, Stan, and so forth, with enormous flow on benefits to writers for screen. A levy on streaming platform profits of a minimum of 5% of revenue could raise significant amounts of money to support the production of Australian content by being directed back through existing agencies such as Screen Australia and the Australia Council.

Australian Research Council: Ministerial interventions into the operation of the Australian Research Council must be revoked, and the decision-making process of the College of Experts must be respected. Recent interventions by the previous Coalition government were directly almost entirely to stymie research projects in the humanities, most notably in literary scholarship. The previous Minister's allocation of 70% of Linkage grants to the government's 'Manufacturing Priorities' must be revoked, and Linkage grants must be made equally available to the full spectrum of research, including arts and humanities.

Australian Publishing: a new Cultural Policy would recognise the importance of the local publishing industry in the development of Australian writing. It should seek to increase government support for small to medium scale Australian book publishers, thereby increasing publication of Australian writers. Support for the literary magazine industry should also be enhanced.

Australian Libraries: libraries have borne deep funding cuts over the past few decades. A new cultural policy should recognise the essential role they play, not just in the provision of reading matter and information services, but in the promotion of literacy and community. All three levels of government must work together to support and expand the role of libraries as vibrant community hubs and enhance their capacity to encourage reading and the dissemination of Australian literature. An expanded libraries program could support local book clubs, literacy teaching for adults, public readings, and writers' residencies, thereby reinvigorating appreciation for literature, including Australian literature, at all levels of the population. The **National Library of Australia's** essential role as the repository of all material published nationally, as well as the premier collecting institution for Australian literature, history and culture, must be honoured by revoking 'Efficiency Dividends' and instituting increased funding. This will enhance the NLA's ability to support the collection of Australian literature and archival materials, and to enable the NLA to engage with the research community through Fellowships and grant opportunities.

Australian Broadcasting Corporation: The ABC is facing a crisis in underfunding at a time when independent journalism and Australian content in the media is also under threat. A robust

democracy needs independent journalism and broadcasting on radio, television and online that is free from government interference, advertising and other commercial interests. The broadcaster needs freedom to develop Australian content, in particular Australian stories and Australian drama for wide audiences. Triennial funding should be restored in real terms to allow independent broadcasting at the ABC to flourish.