

2022-23 Pre-Budget Submissions

Reading for Life: An Australian Plan for Reading and Books

From the Australian Booksellers Association (ABA) and the Australian Publishers Association (APA)

Our Aims

This proposal seeks to maximise the benefits of reading, books, stories, and published research to the Australian people, economy, and the nation.

The Commonwealth Government has an opportunity through its **2022-23 Budget** process to address some of the long term development needs for reading and the book industry in Australia.

This submission is made in light of substantial internal industry consultation about industry and community needs and following substantial consultation with line departments and statutory bodies in the arts industry.

Total Ask

In pursuit of **four outcomes** we make **nine recommendations** for funding. Our provisional costing of these items suggest a national need for approximately \$12 million to \$15 million in new recurrent funding, plus additional one-off expenditures. All these items are currently being costed in consultation with government and our partners. We are happy to provide further advice as needed.

Four Outcomes and Nine Recommendations

Outcome 1: A reading nation

Popular participation in reading for personal, social, educational, and professional reasons is fundamental to Australia's future. Reading contributes to our civic health, our economic capacity and to the cultural lives of Australians—including shaping our sense of ourselves as a people. A nation that reads is invariably a healthy one.

Unfortunately, not all the signs are good. Nearly 30% of Australians don't read or are infrequent readers. And what many people are reading is changing. Many Australians increasingly rely on low quality information from social media rather than enjoying, and passing on, the benefits of reading quality published materials.

There are a number of **barriers to participation in reading** for government to think about:

- Encouragement of regular reading often takes a back seat to support of other aspects of Australian life including participation in sporting culture, television culture and, more recently, social media;
- Many children are not encouraged to read, including many who are not provided with vital experiences of reading in intimate settings in early life;
- Some Australians, particular older Australian and those with vision-impairments, face significant barriers to reading and require texts in accessible formats; and
- As a nation we do not make the most of the reading that we do: there is only modest support for the public or social life of books and reading which would ensure readers and others maximise the benefits of their reading for themselves and for the community.

The APA and the ABA supports measures by government to ensure that

- All Australians learn the habit of reading;
- Australians are supported to read when they are young, particularly in safe family, library and school settings;
- We ensure books are available in 'accessible' formats (including international standard e-books and audio books formats) so all Australians can have access to books and be regular readers;
- Programs of live literary and reading events at festivals, the community, schools, and bookshops – particularly reading programs featuring Australian writers, reading or talking about their own work

✓ **Recommendation 1: A nation of daily readers:**

The Commonwealth Government allocate recurrent funding to establish an ongoing full-year “Australia Reads” public reading campaign to make reading a daily habit for all Australians.

- A. **Public Reading campaigns:** Promotion of reading in Australia through the development and deployment of public messaging about reading and books, including targeted messaging to demographics of marginal readers
- B. **Writers in schools and communities:** Expansion of the Australia Reads Ambassador program to feature support for in person and on-line
 - a. literary events at writers festivals, for writing organisations, and in bookshops—particularly those in regional Australia, and
 - b. reading and literary events in schools (and for education resources in regional Australia such as streaming TV shows focussing on children's books)
- C. **Program of research into reader behaviour** in Australia with a view to increasing reader participation

✓ **Recommendation 2: Accessible Books:**

The Commonwealth Government allocate one-off funding for a three-year program to address barriers to access to books, such as geography or disability, through the expansion of the digital delivery of Australian writing in multiple formats including e-book and audio.

Proposal: In order to to address barriers to access to books we recommend funding for the following initiatives

Training development and roll out: The book industry is working internationally with the World Intellectual Property Organisation (WIPO) and the Accessible Books Consortium (ABC) to **develop training for authors and publishers, to embed accessible design in the publishing workflow**. In Australia, plans are to run briefings for CEOs, followed by two-day courses in all the major cities for publishers, designers, authors, illustrators, indexers and other stakeholders, backed up by online webinars for those unable to attend face-to-face sessions.

Metadata standards and platforms: Developing and implementing metadata standards will overcome a major barrier to **making accessible books discoverable for people with print disability**. The two principal platforms are Title Page (used by bookshops and libraries) and Trove (used by libraries and individuals). Further development of both platforms would enable print disability groups to integrate their catalogues into these national databases.

Knowledge hub: Each AIPi partner organisation holds useful information and resources, but there is currently no easy way to share this knowledge. A knowledge hub would provide **a central repository which could not only be**

accessed by AIPI members, but by any organisation, interested party or individual member of the public.

Outcome 2: A nation of storytellers

Australians have been story tellers for likely upwards of 50,000 years¹. Collectively, oral tales and song—and later—novels, plays, poetry, histories, and non-fiction have fostered a resonant understanding of the Australian experience. The many versions of our many stories—about our lands, waters, heroes, history, culture, politics, and people—carry and shape our understanding of ourselves.

Writers are the starting point for the stories of the nation, but changes in the cultural economy—including cuts to grant funds and the digital disruption of the newspaper, magazine, and book sectors—mean that on average, writers now earn less than \$13,000 a year from their creative practice—in a nation where median incomes are now more than \$60,000.

✓ Recommendation 3: Lending Rights Reform:

The Commonwealth Government allocate new recurrent funding for the expansion and modernisation of public and educational lending rights payments to authors and publishers for the use of digital works.

Proposal: This recommendation seeks to modernise Australia’s two lending rights schemes, Public Lending Right (PLR) and Educational Lending Right (ELR). A reformed scheme would

- better compensate authors and publishers for the value they deliver to the nation through library holdings of their material.
- Accelerating the shift to digitally held public and school library collections

✓ Recommendation 4: New Indigenous Writing:

The Commonwealth Government allocate new recurrent annual funding to establish a national development program for Indigenous writers, editors, and publishers.

Proposal: The Commonwealth government allocate new recurrent funding to establish a national development program to help Indigenous writers publish and promote new works. Funds would support

- Professional development for Indigenous writers,
- Professional development for Indigenous and non-indigenous editors of indigenous works,
- Professional development for Indigenous literary agents

¹<https://www.pnas.org/content/115/34/8482>

- Training materials for other literary workers to involved in the publication, promotion, mediation and resale of Indigenous writing, such as publicists, rights sellers, and literary journalists
- The development of promotional materials to assist in international rights sales of works by Australian First National authors
- Ongoing policy advice about the Indigenous metadata and protocols for the engagement with and publications of Indigenous cultural and intellectual property.

These investments will have a substantial impact upon the extent and quality of indigenous works and of the modes of production.

✓ **Recommendation 5: Pipeline for new writing and new talent: The Commonwealth Government new recurrent funding for writing fellowship grants “new talent investment pipeline grants”.**

Proposal: Without support to write there are limits to the months or years most writers can spend on new projects. Over the longer term, these limits threaten to undermine the quality of the corpus of new Australian works including our histories, novels, and non-fiction. This scheme proposes the establishment of fifty additional writing grants a year outside of the current Australia Council system—which has reduced its effectiveness in funding new writing over the past decade.

We propose that the grants need to be at two levels:

- more substantial fellowships for established writers that include both consideration of excellence and of potential market; and
- new talent grants –focussed on mentorships, upskilling and professionalism—that consider artistic merit alongside issues such as regionalism, cultural and subcultural background and indigeneity.

Outcome 3: A modern book industry for both local and international markets

The Australian books industry is a modern publishing sector admired internationally for its success in generating and maintaining a corpus of Australian trade and educational titles. In recent years, it has had particular success in selling the rights to these materials into international markets.

Yet, at the same time the constraints of the size of the Australian market places certain limits on capital and on growth and give rise to a number of structural issues. Those issues associated with the supply chain and with disrupted bookshops and retailing have been made more clear during the COVID pandemic.

Government investment is required if the nation is to enjoy the full benefits of its local industry.

Issues facing the sector include:

- Incomplete digitisation and modernisation of the supply chain;
- Problems of discoverability for Australian titles in both the domestic and international market place;
- Need to modernise the infrastructure supporting independent bookselling. Books are in demand, but book shops are struggling.
- Need to develop metadata capacity to support major changes in how communities access literary materials both commercially and in libraries over the next decade;
- Need to support a public literary culture which foregrounds and discusses all kinds of Australian books in order
 - to maximise their benefits, and
 - ameliorate the negative impact of digital disruption on the civic use of literary resources—such as the declines in spaces for book reviews in the increasingly beleaguered newspapers
- There is a need to ensure that the publishing industry, and the books it produces, **reflect the make-up of Australian society** including regionality, age, education and cultural background.
- Support for a pathway to environmentally **sustainable publishing**
- **Export Market Development:** while the export market for both trade books and educational learning resources have grown substantially over the past two decades, the potential for projecting Australian books into foreign markets, and Australian identity into the global realm, are far from being maximised. A suite of targeted actions and funds could transform our export and foreign rights potential.

✓ **Recommendation 6: A whole-of-industry digitised supply chain and data solution. The Commonwealth Government allocate one-off funding of \$1.5 million to establish Booknet Australia re-tooled national supply chain infrastructure.**

Proposal: the APA seeks government support for a transformational data and supply chain solution for the book industry. Booknet Australia if built and implements would:

- transform the quality of existing metadata through a standardised digital cataloguing tool which underpins marketing, discovery, and e-commerce sales;
- Serve as a standardised whole-of industry platform for the management of authors' and publishers' rights and royalties data—increasing the reliability and security of licensing revenue.
- produce data for forecasting consumer demand and sales— including serving as a source of much needed Industry data, statistics and research about reading, the book industry and authorship
- offer curated content for consumers, booksellers, libraries in order to enhance the personal, social, educational and civic benefits of books and published research;

✓ Recommendation 7: National Book Voucher Scheme

The Commonwealth Government allocate one-off funding of \$250,000 to establish a National Book Voucher Scheme for Australian ‘bricks and mortar’ bookshops.

Proposal: A national digital book voucher scheme would benefit readers, retailers, publishers and authors by generating sales across the country—it would facilitate ‘in-person’ and e-commerce book sales, underpinning the sustainability of the Australian book industry through higher revenues and increasing community access to books and reading.

✓ Recommendation 8: Development of Export Markets for Australian Books and Australian book rights: The Commonwealth Government allocate one-off funding of \$1.5 million (to be expended over four years) for the Australian book industry to capitalise on emerging global markets for Australian books. (Plus new recurrent funding of \$250,000 per annum).

Proposal: in order to position the Australian book industry to resume exports as the international book trade rebuilds after COVID a consolidated export program would include the following funded elements

- Training for publishers in Rights business practices, appropriate rights software, and sales record keeping
- Development of a stock of template contracts and author agreements—and provide support for contract assessment services currently provided by the ASA and Arts Law Centre of Australia.
- The development of ‘Think Australian’ and ‘Hello from Australia!’ style promotional materials materials for publishers and agents at overseas book fairs.
- Biennial rights sales symposium in Australia: including formal mentoring programs between experienced rights sellers and less experienced industry members.
- An industry-wide initiative to develop and promote the use of metadata to identify First Nations authors and authors from diverse backgrounds would enable broad-based data collection and analysis from existing datasets to examine changes in the publication and rights sales of these books.
- Expansion of funding for the Visiting International Publishers (VIPs) program and other potential incoming international delegations.
- Continue support for overseas trade missions to key territories.
- Continue support for translation grants and grants for market attendance at book fairs.
- Continue and improve funding support for Australian stands at key book fairs.
- Draw on initiatives by Canada and France to raise the profile of Australia’s literature and leading thinkers overseas via diplomatic channels. This has the

potential benefit of building Australia's soft power as well as promoting interest in rights sales acquisitions.

- Extend the Public Lending Right (PLR) scheme to include ebooks and audiobooks. This is consistent with policy imperatives behind payments for loans of hard copy books from public libraries to Australian authors, upon reaching a certain threshold of loans. This support enables Australian authors to spend more time working on the quality of their books and writing.

Outcome 4: Strategic national reading and book policy-making

Australia needs a well thought-through and expertly implemented reading and books policy to ensure that the nation has a literary sector that can deliver the providential dividends of a healthy reading and book culture. But unfortunately, Commonwealth Government investment in reading and books is at a critically low level, and in the past decade the industry has lost its most important setting for consulting with the government about book industry needs and national literary priorities.

The demise of the Literature Board in 2014, the shelving of the mooted Book Industry Council in 2016, and a 40% fall in Australia Council funding for literature over the decade to 2021, including a heavy axe on literary organisations for children, signal the need for reset of what government wants from the literary sector and a reset for the mechanism of policy making and funding delivery.

Literature currently receives around \$5 million in direct Australia Council funding each year, the least amount of any major art-form. The Australia Council has also made very few direct strategic investments to address the structural needs of the reading and books sector. This is despite modest investments in literature returning benefits of at least 2.5 times higher than average.²

The APA and ABA are concerned about about a number matters in relation to the management and funding of literary policy

- There is need for ongoing funding to underwrite the interconnected network of small writing, reading, and and literary organisation which collectively constitute institutional structures of Australian literature: such as writers festivals, writers centres, children's literature centres, databases, literary magazines, book review publications, and literary residential programs;
- There is a need for a new mechanisms for government and industry to develop policy – including literary and book policy across jurisdictions; and
- There is a need for a new mechanism for supporting literary activity outside of the Australia Council which has failed to support literature in a responsible way in the last decade.

² Australia Council analysis of all organisations funded through the multi-year program

✓ **Recommendation 9: Ongoing funding for Literary Infrastructure: The Commonwealth Government allocate new recurrent funding to support the recovery and growth of reading and books infrastructure organisations.**

Proposal: There is a clear case for the Commonwealth Government to act to ensure that the literary infrastructure in Australia is on a footing to serve the needs of the community. Following a decade of cuts to the Australia Council, literary infrastructure has contracted significantly including services targeted at children and families.

The APA and the ABA recommend the Commonwealth Government commit to the long-term funding of literary infrastructure in the way it does to major performing arts organisations. The key categories for funding include:

- **Children and Young People:** Organisations delivering programs by and for children and young people.
- **Key Industry Infrastructure:** Organisations with national and international reach or delivering strategic programs.
- **Commissioning Organisations:** independent publishers, and Literary magazines; translation grants; and promotion grants
- **Promoting and Presenting Organisations:** Support writers' festivals, writers' centres and national residencies creating opportunities for audience and writer development, delivering public value, with a particular focus on regional areas.

BACKGROUND TO THIS PROPOSAL

About the Australian Booksellers Association and the Australian Publishers Association

The Australian Publishers Associations (APA) and Australian Booksellers Association (ABA) are the key industry organisations representing more than 200 publishers and 800 bookstores. This submission has been prepared following consultation with the government and with our allies, the Australian Library and Information Association (ALIA); and the Australian Society of Authors.

How reading and books serve the aims of the nation

The pandemic of 2020 and 2021 has underlined the ongoing digital disruption of reading, authorship and publishing in Australia. While many Australians found solace in books, aspects of the way we purchase, access, and read will be forever different. And not all the changes are good for our hopes for a nation that reads widely and well. This plan addresses the impact of COVID-19 on the book industry, but it also takes in hand the potential of stories, research, publishing and reading to serve the strategic interests of the nation:

- Reading supports Australian social wellness and educational outcomes;
- Books and reading grow quality jobs and increase the employability of Australians;
- Australian stories and history forge and project Australian identity and sovereignty; and
- Australian research leads to sustainability, innovation, and economic development.

Overall the writing and books sector

- turns over more \$2 billion in revenue per annum,
- employs more than 40,000 Australians (many more if you include all 20,000 Australian authors who are registered for copyright)
- sustains more than 1,000 businesses, publishes more than 22,000 new Australian titles each year,
- engages more than 9 million library members, and
- educates and entertains the more than 16 million Australians who read a book each year.

Books, writing, reading and libraries are part of what makes Australia an admired modern democracy. Reading contributes in a significant way to who we are as a people and a nation. The Australian book industry is vital to our civic and cultural life and to our responsibilities to educate all Australians.

Books also drive other sectors of the creative industry: books (particularly novels, memoir, biographies and histories) serve as the sources for adaptation into film and television and for the stage. Book publishing and reading underpin the wider culture.

Cuts in public investment in Reading and Books.

Since 2010, governments at all levels have cut their investment in reading, writing, and the book industry. Most markedly, Commonwealth investment in literature and reading has fallen by more than 40% over the past decade from \$7.7 million in 2009-10 to \$4.7 million in 2020-21. In a large part this is due to the defunding of significant reading promotion initiatives, Get Reading and Books Alive, in 2014.

In the same timeframe, the demise of the Literature Board of the Australia Council as a mechanism for support and for policy making has removed any dedicated mechanism for development or discussion of policy responding to industry or national needs.

The Office of the Arts, within the Department of Infrastructure, Transport, Regional Development and Communications, and the Director of Literature at Australia Council both serve an important function in advising the government about books policy and funding, but overall the government attention to reading and books is in decline despite their importance.

How this proposal was developed

This proposal is the fruits of an ongoing conversation within industry and discussion between industry and all layers of government about

- I. how Australian books and stores, published research and reading can serve the nation; and
- II. how governments might act to support these vital features of Australian life.

Within industry and the community the key discussants are the peak industry bodies who comprise the book industry including individual publishers, booksellers, authors, writers' festivals, writer's centres, literature centres (including those for children), universities, and various instrumentalities serving key roles such as copyright bodies.

In 2013 the Book Industry Collaborative Council (BICC) recommended government action on the following issues (p.19):

- Copyright;
- Improved industry data;
- Re-tooling the Distribution and supply chain to be customer-focused;
- the inclusion of ebooks in public lending rights schemes;
- Support for scholarly publishing to ensure the availability of quality Australian content; and
- Support for skills development in the publishing industry.

In October 2021, the House of Representatives Standing Committee on Communications and the Arts took written and oral evidence in forming its report, *Sculpting a National Cultural Plan*. There were more than 35 submissions from authors, publishers, booksellers and libraries including Helen Garner, Sophie

Cunningham, Nick Earls, Peter Carey, Christos Tsiolkas, Charlotte Wood, Hannah Kent, Trent Dalton, Grace Lucas-Pennington, and Kate Grenville.

Among its many observations the report notes

“Australia’s literature industry is a major contributor to the arts in Australia, promoting Australian stories both within the country and abroad. These stories are often diverse, and include the works of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities and marginalised communities. Alongside telling stories, the literature industry in Australia is closely connected to Australian schools, universities, libraries and literacy programs.” (2.87)

And elsewhere

“[...] within the creative domains, literature and print media was found to be in the top four cultural production domains, generating \$9.5 billion in GVA [Gross Value Added] in 2016-17. Of the total GVA of culture and creative activity, literature, print and media was found to account for 10.9 per cent. In comparison, the remaining cultural production domains were found to generate considerably smaller GVA than literature and print media.” (2.88)

The report made **two specific recommendations**:

- a review of the PLR/ELR programs to ensure that authors are being appropriately compensated for income lost through free multiple use of their books in public and educational lending libraries.
- The Committee recommends that there be a minimum threshold of Australian-authored literary texts in the Australian Curriculum.

These elements have been noted in the drafting of this submission.

28 January 2022