

# WRITING \_\_\_\_\_

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## **Writing WA Submission to Parliamentary Inquiry into Australia's Creative and Cultural Industries October, 2020.**

Standing Committee on Communications and the Arts  
House of Representatives  
Parliament House  
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### **The direct and indirect economic benefits and employment opportunities of creative and cultural industries and how to recognise, measure and grow them.**

#### **THE CURRENT ECONOMY**

A considerable body of data already exists to identify the current value of creative and cultural industries to the Australian economy.

The Federal Government's *Bureau of Communications and Arts Research report into Cultural and creative activity in Australia, 2008-09 to 2016-17* identified the value of cultural and creative activity in Australia as 111,713 billion, representing 6.4% of GDP. Of this total, despite a decline over the period since 2008-09, Literature and Print Media remains the fourth largest domain, valued in 2016-17 at \$9,371 million.

*The Big Picture: Public Expenditure On Artistic, Cultural And Creative Activity In Australia*, a report prepared by independent think tank A New Approach (ANA), identified that: *More than half a million Australians work in the creative economy, which employed 593,830 people in 2016, representing about 5.5 per cent of the national workforce.*

Additional data can be found in reports such as: *The 2009 Productivity Commission Report into the Restrictions on the Parallel Importation of Books* which identified the total value of the book market in Australia at that time as approximately \$2.5 billion a year.

While previous data has been collected by various agencies and for a variety of purposes, we recommend that the future collection of data be undertaken consistently and within the framework of a national policy/strategy for the development of Australian creative and cultural industries.

#### **THE FUTURE ECONOMY**

In a 2016 report, *The Future of Work; Setting Kids Up for Success*, research conducted by the Regional Australia Institute and funded by Australia's Broadband Network identified that the future

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job market will be *flexible, entrepreneurial and dynamic* and that to succeed, young people will require a combination of:

- *Hard specialist knowledge skills like Science, Technology, Engineering and Maths, plus Entrepreneurship, Art and Design – STEAMED.*
- *Soft people skills like critical thinking, communication, collaboration, connectivity, creativity, and culture.*

The Foundation for Young Australians also identified in its report, *The New Work Smarts, Thriving in the new work order*, that by 2030 Australian workers will spend...*Almost 100% more time at work solving problems, 17% more time per week using verbal communication and interpersonal skills, 41% more time on critical thinking and judgment, 77% more time using science and mathematics skills*, and that: *Workers will need to develop an entrepreneurial mindset.*

In stark contrast to this predicted future, the Federal Government's recent Higher Education Bill, which significantly increases the cost of humanities degrees, can be expected to discourage access to tertiary education in areas critical for Australia's future economy.

Building a more resilient economy both now and for the future requires that the Government recognise the value of our cultural and creative industries to the economy, invests appropriately in the sector and its current infrastructure, and further commits to policy and investment that will allow and support the next generation of creatives to emerge.

We therefore recommend the following measures:

- **For cultural and creative industries broadly:**
  - > The development of a comprehensive national creative industries and cultural policy to establish co-ordinated and long-term frameworks for investment.
  - > A reversal of the decision to increase fees for higher education humanities degrees.
- **For the writing and publishing industry specifically:**
  - > Within the framework of a national cultural policy, the development of a national strategy to support the growth and development of the Australian writing and publishing industry.
  - > Increased federal investment through the Australia Council to Australia's writers, publishers and writing sector organisations to bring this investment in line with Australia's high level of engagement with reading.

### **The non-economic benefits that enhance community, social wellbeing and promoting Australia's national identity, and how to recognise, measure and grow them.**

The non-economic benefits of the creative industries, and of reading and writing in particular, can be identified across a broad spectrum – from the role of the arts in reflecting national heritage and identity and growing national pride, to supporting mental health and well-being, to building social cohesion, to sharing knowledge and information and contributing to the development of a Smart economy (yes, back to the economy again). Such benefits are comprehensively articulated in the Australia Council's recently published ***Creating Our Future: Results of the National Arts Participation Survey 2019 Report.***

With particular reference to Australia's writing and publishing industries, writer Kate Grenville has previously articulated the value of Australian literature in this way: *It's obviously important for the vitality of our nation to be able to read about our own history, our people, our issues, in books*

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*written by Australians primarily for Australians. Without that conversation with ourselves we'd be an impoverished and stunted society. (Productivity Commission 2009 Report Regarding Restrictions on the Parallel Importation of Books).*

The Productivity Commission Report further identified the following key points in relation to the cultural value of books: *Books are a significant source of cultural value to Australia. Australian books can act as repositories of national history, help to build or maintain a unique national identity and enhance an individual's connection with Australian society. The cultural value arising from the creation of a book is significantly amplified by the broad dissemination of the ideas it contains. Books can also provide benefits through improving literacy, diffusing knowledge and ideas, and enhancing interaction.*

Reading for personal well-being and good mental health must also be added to this list of non-economic benefits. In the era of disruption in which we currently live, where Australians are dealing simultaneously with the stresses of the climate crisis, pandemic, multiple environmental disasters, and a cultural assault on truth and science-based information, it is interesting to note that Australian publishers report upticks in sales/downloads of non-fiction books and peer-reviewed content (for knowledge and possible solutions?) and escapist fiction (for comfort?).

### **The best mechanism for ensuring cooperation and delivery of policy between layers of government.**

We recommend the development and implementation of a comprehensive national cultural policy which takes into consideration the cross-government synergies that exist and can be leveraged between the creative/cultural industries and education; tourism; international relations and soft diplomacy; health and well-being; social value and community cohesion, and economic development.

### **The impact of COVID-19 on the creative and cultural industries**

#### **Challenges**

The impact of Covid-19 on the creative and cultural industries has been devastating to many individual practitioners, to arts organisations, venues, and to many other associated businesses located in hospitality, tourism, technical production, construction, transport, and so. This is a fact already documented in numerous reports and surveys, and clearly acknowledged by the Government when announcing the *COVID-19 Creative Economy Support Package*.

Despite a swift and, to a large extent, effective transition by the writing, publishing and book retail sectors to lockdown, the impacts of Covid-19 have nevertheless been felt across the supply chain. Publishers have delayed the release of titles (leading to an unprecedented backlog of new books now hitting the market simultaneously) and publishing schedules have been disrupted (creating concerns regarding a further contraction in publishing opportunities in the longer term). In WA, publishers have reported downturns in sales and further concerns regarding a downturn in consumer confidence and the effect of this on sales going forward. Publishers are also addressing the loss of revenue from foreign rights sales as a result of not being able to have a physical presence at global trade fairs. Additional pressures have arisen as a result of increased international freight and printing costs.

For many writers, the loss of gig income (from author talks, library talks, schools' activities, writers' festivals, and so on) has been significant. As with other cultural domains, the cancellation of live events such as writers' festivals has further resulted in loss of revenue not only to writers, but to publishers, booksellers, venues and production crews, travel and hospitality providers and so on.

Bricks and mortar bookshops, independent bookshops in particular, have had to work harder and longer hours to maintain business during lock down in competition with online retailers. Industry reports also identified that while there was a general downturn in sales for the first half of 2020, sales of new releases were particularly impacted during lockdown when customers were unable to browse the shelves of physical bookstores.

For individual creators and small business such as publishers and booksellers, there is no doubt that JobKeeper and JobSeeker have been essential sources of revenue during this period.

## **Opportunities**

As businesses and workers across all sectors transitioned to working remotely, the overall response from the writing and publishing sector was generally positive, with writers and readers shifting relatively quickly (though not always smoothly or profitably) from live events to virtual events; bookshops working creatively (although also for longer hours and less financial return) to ensure that books could be put into the hands of readers via home delivery services and other programs, and publishers adapting their business models and publication schedules to accommodate lock down.

Readers also responded through Covid-19 lockdowns with changes being noted in what people were reading and how they were reading. Nielsen Book Australia recently reported that 37% of Australian audiobook consumers began listening to audiobooks for the first time in the past year. CSIRO has reported a significant increase in downloads of scholarly works during lockdown, and spikes in sales of children's books and educational resources, as well as escapist adult fiction have also been noted.

The technologies that have been globally embraced during the pandemic have created opportunities for our sector to overcome some of the financial and practical disadvantages that arise from supplying small population centres across an extremely broad territory. Writing, reading and talking are all activities that are comparatively well-suited to screen and digital delivery and as we have seen such an extraordinary uptake of digital technologies in a very short period of time, opportunities present themselves for the writing and publishing sector to exploit further. With the significant shift to online learning, particular opportunities exist for publishers to support that shift with the creation of new content and resources that deliver increased value for education providers and consumers.

We therefore recommend:

- > Maintaining JobKeeper, JobSeeker - reinstated to previous levels - to support workers (including writers) in the gig economy and downstream small businesses.
- > Increased support for Australia's writers, publishers and writing sector organisations by reinstating federal investment through the Australia Council (recognising funding previously allocated to initiatives such as the Book Council and Books Alive program).
- > Investment in Australian writing and publishing to stimulate the development and marketing of new content for the digital environment.

**Avenues for increasing access and opportunities for Australia's creative and cultural industries through innovation and the digital environment.**

The pivot from live to virtual event delivery, online sales and remote learning during Covid-19 has amplified existing issues regarding access in the digital environment – particularly for communities in regional and remote areas. In Western Australia this is a significant issue indeed. While technology presents the writing and publishing sector with opportunities to reach regional audiences and markets more easily than ever before, access to reliable/adequate broadband continues to be a barrier that needs to be addressed. For many individuals and families there are further economic and physical barriers that prohibit easy/consistent access to online technologies and these too will need to be addressed.

As mentioned previously, the pivot to online learning has presented our sector with opportunities to develop new content that will add value specifically in the digital environment. Stimulus funding to support such content development and marketing would be welcome.

In the Covid environment the potential value of Digital Lending Rights to writers' incomes became even more apparent/significant and we subsequently ask that the Government move to escalate the introduction of DLR in support of Australian copyright holders.

We thank the Inquiry for the opportunity to contribute these views.

Yours sincerely,

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