



Australian Society of **Authors**

May 29, 2008

Mr Frank Sartor
Minister for Planning, Minister for Redfern Waterloo and Minister for the Arts
Level 34 Governor Macquarie Tower
1 Farrer Place
SYDNEY NSW 2000

Dear Minister

Re: Review of NSW Cultural Grants Program Report

The Australian Society of Authors is the professional association for Australia's literary creators and the peak body representing them. The ASA was formed in 1963 to promote and protect the rights of Australia's writers and illustrators, and now has over 3000 members across Australia. The ASA was instrumental in setting up Copyright Agency Limited and the Australian Copyright Council, and successfully campaigned for Public Lending Right in 1975 and Educational Lending Right in 2000. The ASA:

- sets minimum rates of pay and conditions for writers and illustrators;
- publishes books, contracts, papers and lists for emerging and established authors;
- maintains a trust fund to defend the rights of copyright holders;
- lobbies governments at all levels to promote authors and illustrators' professional interests in areas such as copyright, moral rights, and taxation;
- represents its membership to policy-making bodies, and on the boards of copyright collecting and lending rights agencies;
- works with arts organisations, booksellers, publishers, writers' centres and literary agents on campaigns and research projects;
- coordinates special interest groups for children's writers and illustrators, academics, Indigenous writers, isolated writers and translators;
- organises ASA panels at literary festivals;

- conducts and contributes to research on issues concerning Australian literary creators;
- assists members through its Benevolent Fund.

The ASA provided a submission to the Review of the NSW Cultural Grants Program in 2007. Our submission focussed on the need to sustain literary creators in NSW, particularly how authors can live from their writing or associated activities such as attendances (with adequate remuneration) at writers festivals and workshops in schools (Priorities P1 and P4).

The ASA is pleased to note that the recommendations of the Review Panel direct attention to this issue, particularly Recommendations 8 and 9. The ASA sees the increase in the amounts allocated for the NSW Premier's Literary Awards in 2008 as a first step in enhancing the options for authors in NSW to be able to sustain themselves on the income from their writing.

With regard to Recommendation 24, "Funding for regional writers centres to be reviewed", the ASA argues that a review of the activities and functionality of the various writers' centres in NSW¹ would be appropriate not only to map and quantify their contribution to literary creation and the sustainability of literary careers, but also to assess where duplication of services or systems could be streamlined.

While encouraging a review of effectiveness, the ASA does not advocate the consolidation of these centres into web-based resources or any diminution of their funding, but such matters could be contemplated if a review reported negatively on the centres' efficiency and achievement of key performance indicators. However, we would think a negative review unlikely since the success of the centres is demonstrated through such programs as the Byron Bay Writers Festival (although this festival needs to review its payments to participating authors), the Longlines development program for regional writers leading directly to publication and performance, and a variety of effective programs for Indigenous writers.

At present, the centres appear to achieve this level of success remarkably economically. According to the Department of the Arts, Sport and Recreation's *Annual Report 2006-2007*, Arts NSW's funding for the NSW writers centres was less than \$500 000 per year. In this same period, the writers' centres generated more than \$1.8 million through grants, sponsorship and earned income plus over \$300 000 of in-kind support. The ASA believes that these writers' centres fulfil the priorities of the New South Wales State Plan, particularly Priority E8: More people using parks, sporting and recreational facilities, and participating in the arts and cultural activity, Priority R4: Increased participation and integration in

¹ These centres are: Booranga Riverina -- Wagga Wagga, Broken Hill Regional Writers Centre, Central West Writers Centre -- Orange, Hunter Writers Centre -- Newcastle, New England Writers Centre -- Armidale, Northern Rivers Writers Centre -- Byron Bay, NSW Writers Centre -- Sydney, South Coast Writers Centre -- Wollongong), Varuna - the Writers House [Eleanor Dark Foundation]

community activities and Priority P6: Increased business investment in rural and regional NSW.

With regard to sustaining the continuing careers of NSW authors, writers' centres are a significant source of income. The ASA encourages these centres to use ASA rates and conditions as a basis for payments to authors engaged by these centres for workshops, performances and residences. However, many of the centres state that they do not receive sufficient funding to be able to pay ASA rates, which are merely the bare minimum for a sustainable income as an author. The ASA would encourage a review of the NSW writers' centres to ensure they receive sufficient funding for their programs to employ writers at professional rates and standards, and that the programs are continually aligned with recognised industry standards.

Yours sincerely

Dr Jeremy Fisher
Executive Director