



Department of
**Local Government, Sport
and Cultural Industries**

WRITING SECTOR REVIEW:

THE ENRICHMENT OF WA'S ECONOMY, COMMUNITY, CULTURE AND ARTS

Writing Sector Review Reference Group Recommendations

June 2017

Introduction

Appropriate investment in the WA writing sector will:

- Halt a steady decline in WA writing, employment and publishing activities relative to the rest of Australia;
- Create further opportunities for the sector to make distinctive and significant contributions to WA culture; the lives of people throughout the State; economic, social and educational development; and, national and international perceptions of the State; and,
- Increase the return from government investment in new and existing arts and cultural infrastructure and arts related services from film to multimedia and libraries to literary festivals.

This paper has been prepared by the Writing Sector Review Reference Group established by Culture and the Arts (WA) a division of the Department of Local Government, Sport and Cultural Industries (DLGSC) to make recommendations following a consultancy review of WA writing. These recommendations should be read in conjunction with the consultant report '*WA Writing Sector Review Final Report and Conclusions*' by Positive Solutions available from DLGSC.

The current situation

Historically, West Australians can boast significant literary achievements with many nationally and internationally recognised and award winning iconic authors. The foundation of WA literature has been established by writers such as Elizabeth Jolley (1923-2007), poet Dorothy Hewett (1923-2002), writer and poet Randolph Stow (1935-2010), historian Geoffrey Bolton (1931-2015), Peter Cowan (1914-2002) and Doris Pilkington Garimara (1937-2014).¹

Contemporary writers include Sally Morgan (Prime Minister's Award winner), Tim Winton (four-time Miles Franklin winner), Kim Scott (two-time Miles Franklin winner), Gail Jones (ALS Gold Medal winner), Joan London (Prime Minister's Literary Award), Shaun Tan (Academy Award and Astrid Lindgren Memorial Award) – naming only a few.

There are significant specialist publishers including Fremantle Press who have an impressive record over 40 years, Magabala Books and Hesperian Press amongst others and highly regarded literary festivals in Perth and throughout the State. 231 public libraries serve more than a million active users through more than 16 million physical loans and almost 1.4

¹ Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander readers are advised that the list of writers contains names of people who have died.

million electronic resource loans in 16-17. New initiatives in the support of film development and theatre offer many opportunities for writers.

Within this context, the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) estimates a nine per cent reduction in the number authors in WA from 2006-2011. There are currently only 7.4 per cent of all published authors in Australia located in Western Australia, significantly below the WA's 11% share of Australia's population.²

The Department's purpose of the Review is to identify current challenges, strengths and opportunities and examine strategies and future directions for the sector.

Recommendations

The Reference Group has reviewed the consultants' report as well as a range of other DLGSC data on writing services and related arts and culture activities.

It recognises that, given the current financial circumstances, any recommendations need to be directed towards priorities which will:

- Generate the greatest return by building on the writing sector's proven capacity to achieve significant leverage from DLGSC funding - currently at a rate of \$2.69 for every \$1 of DLGSC support – which has converted the current \$1.3 million into an additional \$3.43 million in income; and,
- Support the Government's commitment to well-targeted investment to support education, economic activity, employment, skills and opportunities to promote WA nationally and internationally.

Within this context the Reference Group makes the following recommendations:

Recommendation 1: Create a hub for writing and creative thinking at the State Library of Western Australia

The State Library of WA is already active in promoting, reading, writing, publishing, literacy and creative thinking but by extending this, in partnership with other organisations, into a centre for the promotion and support writing and literature with a focus on WA writers and their works this would:

- Create a visible, critical mass of publicly accessible WA writing related activity that can help to highlight WA's unique literary talents;

² Book Authors and Their Changing Circumstances: Survey Methods and Results. Throsby, Zwar and Longden (2015, Table 16)

- Integrate writing services, exhibitions and events and activities into the creative entrepôt created by the re-developed State Library, State Theatre, Gallery, Museum and new public square complex thereby fostering new artistic and cultural connections as well as fostering tourism and community engagement through, for instance, a Hyde Park type speakers' corner or public readings in the new square; and,
- Connect the WA community and visitors to WA with WA writers and their publications through booksellers and the State library network

A Writing Hub would provide an overall focus for creative thinking and expression that helps to connect creators with their local, national and international audiences.

Recommendation 2: Conduct a distinctive annual WA Premier's Book Awards

While recommending an annual WA Premier's Book Awards we also recommend that further consideration be given to how this could be distinctively positioned to increase its profile and differentiate it from other state and national awards. The award would be:

- A focal point for promoting WA books and writing and should help to boost sales and marketing impacts for local publishers and booksellers; and,
- Integrated with other activities such as library support, writing festivals, tourism promotion, and community and school education.

Recommendation 3: Use investment in the writing sector to achieve synergies with existing State wide library services and extend and enhance community engagement in books and writing

WA public libraries are highly valued civic assets which provide economic stimulus and contribute significantly to community well-being. They proactively support literacy development from birth which is fundamental to creating a lifelong culture of reading. Public Libraries make a significant contribution to audience development for literature in all its forms. By increasing focus on writing services and events which promote books and writing through libraries throughout the State it would be possible to create what would be, in effect, Australia's biggest continuous writers and readers' festival.

It is recommended that this can be achieved by:

- Funding assistance to libraries for writers' talks, reading events and mini-festivals; and,
- Creating an online information and booking platform on which writers, libraries and writing organisations can promote their activities.

Recommendation 4: Foster professional development for writers to enable them to navigate the increasingly complex areas of rights and multi-media opportunities

WA's creative workforce represents 3.76 per cent of the state's total workforce (cf 5.29 per cent nationally) and increasingly the opportunities for further employment growth are linked to the complex interactions between the different converging and emerging aspects of cultural production from film, TV and radio production, games development, multi-media, music and performing arts to writing and publishing.

Navigating this mix of converging and emerging opportunities to enable writers to increase their incomes, improve employment opportunities and participate in the creation of new artistic and cultural outputs will require professional development support to help them:

Understand and negotiate rights both for published works and further their exploitation in other forms such as films, TV and multi-media, storytelling through podcasts and oral stories;

- Identify new writing opportunities;
- How to secure and gain benefit from emerging global opportunities for foreign and multi-platform rights; and,
- Benefit from State government's investment in Screenwest designed to encourage the film sector to develop and produce films from existing and new WA stories;

This professional development support could be provided through some combinations of Writers Hub services, writers groups support, online information and cooperation with tertiary institutions creative writing courses.

Recommendation 5: Continue existing support for WA publishers and investigate targeted policies to encourage more WA work and stories to be published by national and international publishers

Both globally and nationally the publishing industry continues to face a number of challenges although reading continues to be a major leisure and learning activity.

Niche, local and independent publishers are both challenged by, and provide opportunities from, these challenges.

Nevertheless, existing and new WA publishers can benefit from support which allows them to contribute to making WA writing more accessible, more widely known and a source of national and international recognition of WA's distinctive identity.

DLGSC should investigate incentive grants for local publishers and writers who succeed in gaining new access to national and international markets, with specific support for translation services.

In order to protect jobs in the writing sector and the intellectual property of WA writers, these incentives grants should be monitored by the WA sector and Government. The for the implications of the recommendations of the Harper Review and Productivity Commission's 2016 draft report into intellectual property arrangements should also be monitored.

Recommendation 6: Enhance data collection about WA writing to provide benchmarks and evidence for policy development

Currently, DLGSC has access to a wide range of data about arts and cultural activities in WA. As a corollary of the implementation of any recommendations, and without duplicating ABS, Australia Council and other data sources, it is recommended that specific data on writing services: numbers of writers', publishers, events, activities and so on be gathered to provide benchmarks and evidence for future policy development.

Recommendation 7: Recognition of writingWA as the peak body for WA writers

writingWA should be encouraged to emulate the successful Writer's Victoria model of becoming a membership based organisation including individual writers with diverse funding sources from Government, members contributions and the corporate sector. writingWA should be provided with clear contractual outputs and outcomes and encouraged to act as a support body for smaller community based writing organisations.

As an advocacy and development body writingWA should be independent of the State Library of WA but could contribute programs to the proposed WA Writing Hub at the State Library.

DLGSC should consider the provision of space within the Kings Street Arts Centre for writingWA.

Recommendation 8: Support for screen writing and playwriting

Screenwest should continue to support the development of WA screen writing and facilitate inclusion of resources for screenwriter development within the new Screen Hub at the ABC studios in East Perth.

The Blue Room continues to support WA emerging playwrights but fewer WA writers are being commissioned to write for production companies. The State Government should consider investment to leverage more commissions of major work by WA theatre

companies including Black Swan State Theatre, Barking Gecko, Yirra Yaakin and Spare Parts Puppet Theatre.

Conclusion

There are other recommendations and suggestions for concepts and activities in the consultant's review which would stimulate the WA writing sector and which ought to be explored further. However, the emphasis in this Reference Group response is on targeted, readily implementable and cost effective recommendations which could be implemented which can provide a foundation for future policy initiatives.

Writing Sector Review Reference Group:

- Duncan Ord, A/Director General, Department of Local Government, Sport and Cultural Industries
- Margaret Allen, State Librarian and CEO State Library of Western Australia
- Colin Walker, Executive Director, Culture and the Arts (WA)
- Noel Turnbull, Adjunct Professor Media and Communications RMIT University
- Kate Eltham, Manager: Reading and Writing, State Library of Queensland
- Clive Newman, writers agent
- Katherine Dorrington, PIAF Program Manager: Perth Writers Festival
- Natasha Lester, award-winning author