



March 2025

Submission from

**The New Zealand Society of Authors Te Puni Kaituhi o Aotearoa
(PEN NZ Inc) to Discussion Document: Media Reform**

The New Zealand Society of Authors Te Puni Kaituhi o Aotearoa (PEN NZ Inc) (NZSA) makes this submission to the Ministry of Culture and Heritage.

- NZSA is the pre-eminent professional body in Aotearoa New Zealand representing over 1800 writers.
- Founded in 1934, NZSA is a not-for-profit membership organisation, an incorporated society and registered charity.
- NZSA works across the sector to raise the visibility of New Zealand books as writers produce local content.
- NZSA provides professional development programmes, administer prizes and awards, and advocate for creative rights and fair reward.

All references to 'literature' or books and writing in this submission apply to the output of the book sector in all its forms and acknowledge the foundational importance of creative writing across the creative industries ecosystems and as the engine-room for content.

NZSA upholds the importance of nurturing our unique cultural talent and notes the importance of the arts to our collective sense of national identity, well-being and legacy.

Authors are primary producers who drive the creative economy, and we acknowledge the work of writers, screenwriters and journalists as the beating heart of media and screen.



Diagram: Australian Society of Authors

The New Zealand Society of Authors wishes to submit to Section 2
Increasing investment into and discoverability of local content:

a) Legislate a Local Content Quota:

We call, in the strongest terms that Aotearoa New Zealand renegotiate the GATS Free Trade agreement that signed away NZ's right to a Local Content Quota and did a such disservice to our creative sector and industries.

The absence of a Local Content Quota inhibits the uptake, visibility and adaptation of NZ writers' work to radio, film and television. New Zealand is one of few countries in the world *without* a Local Content Quota.

A Local Content Quota would preserve and reflect our cultural experience and allow us to celebrate our national identity and unique culture and heritage. We recommend MCH work with MFAT to *renegotiate that clause in the Free Trade Agreement* to give NZ the ability to instigate a Local Content Quota in line with international best practice.

We recommend the instigation of a Local Content Quota along the lines of Australia's legislation which requires 55% local content be broadcast between 6am and midnight.

In Australia, this policy has generated a significant increase in adaptations of local stories for screen, which in turn generates jobs and career pathways and a vibrant industry and increases export potential and earnings on international streaming platforms.

b) Instigate a pipeline to adapt NZ books for screen.

There is no pipeline to encourage *adaptation of NZ books* projects through to screen sector script development programmes via its current funding models and opportunities. While there are half a dozen development programmes in screen sector organisations that run programmes, clinics and mentorships that '*develop original ideas for scripts*', there is NO funding or development pipeline specifically to encourage *adaptation* of NZ books to screen.

In the US around 74% of all films made are adapted from books. In Australia, that figure is reportedly around 35%.

In NZ only a small number of NZ books have found their way to screen across the span of the last 50 years. Less than 30 films have been adapted to screen from books and short stories, cartoons and children's books, listed in this collection [HERE](#), amongst a few documentaries about NZ writers. Considering the immense output from NZ writers and the smorgasbord of wonderful stories published over the last century, this is both woeful and illustrates the huge potential of untapped content in NZ books.

We recommend the Film Commission and NZ on Air prioritise the adaptation of quality NZ books - current and historic - to screen, in a bespoke programme designed to encourage cross-pollination with the Book Sector.

NZSA supports the introduction of incentives to encourage the adaptation of NZ books for screen. Writer, publishers and book agents wish to work more closely with NZ On Air, The Film Commission, Radio NZ and TVNZ to collaborate and incentivise adaptation pathways and investment in NZ writers and published books to bring those stories to life on screen.

This must include *fair payment* in options agreements for the broadcast or adaptation rights for books and short stories with New Zealand publishers and writers.

c) Radio NZ charter obligations and adaption of NZ writing for broadcast:

NZSA believes neither RNZ nor TVNZ is currently meeting its existing charter obligations to promote NZ writing and writers named as 'literary culture' in the charter.

The RNZ charter calls directly for promotion of NZ writing - plays, books, poetry, children's stories. Radio NZ has reported to NZSA it has had a zero budget to purchase NZ writing for adaptation for around 10 years.

RNZ has written to many authors pleading poverty and asking for broadcast and adaptation rights to be waived so they may use the writers' work for free.

However, RNZ pay the narrator who reads it, and the engineer who records the piece. We believe that this practice of *paying everyone except the writer* contravenes RNZ's charter obligations.

We recommend that RNZ pays authors fairly and adapts and commissions more NZ books for broadcast.

d) Current Coverage of NZ Book Content:

Making the Case for a Weekly NZ Book Show

Many RNZ programmes and producers favour interviewing international authors and seem to suffer from a cultural cringe bias which is harmful to our local book sector.

RNZ book interviews and reviews are dominated by international author interviews from multinational publishers who have dedicated fulltime publicists with the resources to work closely with producers, which weights coverage towards international books.

As an example, Stacy Gregg who won the *Margaret Mahy Book of the Year* at the NZCYP Children's Book Awards in 2024, has never been interviewed on RNZ about her novel. It was announced she won in an 8 second soundbite on Morning Report but New Zealanders have never had the opportunity to hear her talk about that book on RNZ, despite RNZ programmes having interviewed and re-interviewed visiting international children's writers.

NZSA recommends a weekly Book Show on national radio.

There is NO book show on TNVZ or RNZ, while programmes abound to promote NZ music. We have had no NZ Book Show on Radio NZ *ever*, and no Book Show on TV since 2012. The last show is archived [HERE](#)

Books and Reading is the second most popular artform New Zealanders say they engage with after music. This is not reflected in the coverage of NZ books and writers on NZ public media.

The [Visibility Matters](#) report (Creative NZ, 2023) reports only 2.7% of NZ media coverage is arts coverage, and that the literature sector receives the lowest percentage within that very small slice.

CONCLUSION:

In conclusion we point out to the Ministry that The Book Sector has no agency to represent and advocate for it across government, and that oversight results in this lack of support for the book sector and loss of opportunities for collaboration across the creative industries.

Unlike Opera, Ballet, Theatre, NZ On Air, the BSA and RNZ, the Antarctic Heritage Centre, Te Matatini, the Music Commission, the Film Commission, Sound and Music, Orchestras and Sport there is NO government funded entity that promotes or looks after the interests of *Books, Writers and Reading*: the literary and literacy sector. This is clear in the diagram below taken from the MCH website that shows the book sector is invisible.

Considering the links between local publishing and literacy, and the proven links between literacy, educational and life achievement, recidivism and mental health, this is astonishing. There has been a significant slide in NZ's OECD literacy rankings that is hardly a surprise with such a lack of attention and investment in books and reading.

We ask that you view our recommendations for greater visibility for NZ books and writers across NZ media with this glaring example below of a sector overlooked, with the consequent missed opportunities for NZ books and writers.



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