



THE NEW ZEALAND SOCIETY OF AUTHORS
TE PUNI KAITUHI O AOTEAROA (PEN NZ INC)

Friday, September 30, 2025

Te Reo & reading resources; Literacy

To the Honorable Erica Stanford,

The New Zealand Society of Authors writes to protest the decision to reject hybrid Te Reo Māori and English texts for the curriculum, as well as defunding resources for teaching Te Reo Māori.

Te Reo Māori is an official language, and general proficiency with the language benefits the whole of our society. New Zealanders speak a hybrid language of English, and many Māori words populate our everyday language. This has been the case for decades.

There are additional and proven neurological benefits to bilingualism. Pedagogy used to think multilingualism adversely affected language skills, but the converse is now proven true. Bilingualism is good for academic achievement.

Local languages and content are linked to improved literacy rates, and reading resources that reflect languages used across New Zealand increase engagement as children see themselves in these stories.

Recent reports of a further drop in literacy rates show this is now a crisis, and eschewing the opportunity for engagement would be contrary to government's aims.

We wrote to you when you took office – and again ask that you recognise the links between literacy and the book sector. Organisations that take local authors into schools, to ignite engagement, *literacy*, and a love of reading, are funded by contestable *literary* funds by the arts ministry yet do some heavy lifting to reverse declining literacy. These organisations, such as Read NZ and Storylines, could achieve much more in collaboration with the Ministry of Education if these programmes, that achieve tangible results, were effectively resourced and expanded to engage more children with writers, stories, books and reading.

Are you familiar with the *NZ Book Awards Trust* annual *Books Alive* programme, and the thousands of books the annual *Hells Pizza Challenge* encourage our children to read? Again, *literary* funding received only from contestable funding rounds at CNZ, supporting *literacy* work. Imagine what we could achieve if there was a Book Commission to sit alongside Music and Screen Commissions to amplify books and reading. Yet, inexplicably, the Book Sector is the only arts sector without a government agency overseeing its growth potential and development.

Given the importance of literacy to life outcomes: not only educational achievement but justice, health, wellbeing, the epidemic of loneliness and ageing, the development of empathy, civic engagement... we are mystified there is not a cross-government taskforce to improve literacy rates. Reading for Pleasure is proven to be a poverty-buster, and research shows youth justice recidivism benefits more from literacy programmes than boot camps. We would be keen to share the research with your office.

The UK has designated *2026 The Year of Reading* – a cross-government undertaking to reverse declining literacy rates; Australia has just launched a commission that is committed to *Australia Reads* and amplifying *Children's Book Week* and other initiatives to drive up literacy. Countries such as Scandinavia and Ireland, who have invested in books, libraries and programmes enjoy the world's highest literacy rates.

We believe investment in a national effort, using proven programme models, and working with the book sector infrastructure and school libraries, can do the same here.

Over 35% of NZ schools have decommissioned their school libraries. This is surely a join-the-dots moment. International research, again, proves a direct correlation between literacy rates and school libraries.

Mandating local content and resources that reflect our everyday speech, investing in reading programmes that engage children with local books and authors, and ensuring schools have well-resourced school libraries is a way to achieve your aims; this strategy is backed by research and evidence, and hosts a range of other flow-on societal benefits.

We look forward to the opportunity to come and discuss this at your earliest convenience.
Ngā mihi,



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Jenny Nagle Chief Executive

Cc Minister of Culture and Heritage – The Honorable Paul Goldsmith

[The-Economic-Social-Cost-of-Illiteracy- 2023.pdf](#)

<https://www.nationalyearofreading.org.uk/>

<https://australiareads.org.au/about-us/advocacy/>

[A Society of Readers: UK – Hilhoist, Lockey Speight Growing Up in NZ – the study](#)

[Experiences of NZ Children Actively Reading for Pleasure \(Growing Up in NZ paper\)](#)

[Radio NZ – OECD literacy scores in NZ falling further](#)

[Storytime Foundation NZ – Reading and Recidivism](#)

[Reading Partners: reading can reduce incarceration rates](#)

The New Zealand Society of Authors Te Puni Kaituhi o Aotearoa (PEN NZ Inc) is a not-for-profit registered charitable entity. We are the principal organisation representing over 1800 writers in New Zealand. Founded in 1934, we administer prizes and awards, provide professional development opportunities, offer mentorship and assessment programmes, share communications and industry news, and provide spaces for writers to meet-up via a regional network of nine branches with online and in-person regional and national events. NZSA collaborates across the book sector to make NZ writing and NZ writers more visible. We advocate for *Read Local, Buy Local*, copyright, and champion fair reward. NZSA is a founding member of The Coalition for Books.