CEO Report

2026 has been a monumental year for the ASA, both in terms of our programming and service delivery, as well as our tireless advocacy. Generative AI represents not only one of the greatest threats to copyright in over a decade, but also an existential threat to professional author and illustrator careers in this country. In times like these it is vital that we broaden our perspective and refuse to give in to a despair which only benefits the exploitative corporations who want to bank on our inaction.

The ASA's 63 year history has been marked by consequential moments like these – battles against colonial royalties or parallel importations and for copyright licensing fees and PLR/ELR. In those moments, too, it felt like what we were facing was impossible to surmount. But authors did what they do – they imagined the world as otherwise. They shunned grim inevitabilities, instead stepping up to make change happen through collective action.

We've had victories, and we've fought off defeats. We removed colonial royalties. We defended against parallel importations and the introduction of fair use. We secured one of the best lending rights schemes in the world, including digital lending rights. We managed to persuade government to knock back a text and data mining exception for AI training. We've won these fights before and we're capable of doing it again.

Thank you to all the authors and illustrators who have spoken up about AI and who will continue to do so to oppose any government plans to weaken copyright law in favour of Big Tech. We are so powerful when we stand together.

Advocacy

This year represented a landmark moment in Australia's history, with the Office for the Arts opening for consultation on the next National Cultural Policy – this represents the first time we will have consecutive national cultural policies in Australia. The ASA encouraged authors, illustrators, and other book industry professionals to build on the momentum of the initial National Cultural Policy, *Revive* and urge the government to continue addressing the decades of chronic underfunding of literature.

The ASA called for increased direct investment in authors and illustrators for time to write and create, investment in First Nations-led writing and publishing, solutions to the offshore theft of Australian creators' work by multinational AI companies, tax

reform to support author careers, resourcing for Writing Australia and interventions in education to support Australian creators and their careers.

We were thrilled to see another wave of submissions from authors, publishers, and literary organisations to the consultation, and look forward to working closely with government to inform the next cultural policy.

Aside from the National Cultural Policy, the ASA's advocacy agenda has once again been dominated by generative AI. In July we applauded the Prime Minister's commitment to Australian creators in a speech about AI on Australia's terms, in which it was stated, 'Setting the terms means we can put in place the **strongest possible protection** for Australian artists and Australian media… Australian writers, musicians, artists and journalists must retain ownership and control of their work… No company should use Australian books, music, art or news to build or train AI without the artist's control. That includes the artist's control of the price and value of their work.'

Since then, the ASA has been concerned about government proposals to weaken our copyright law to allow for AI training in Australia. Such proposals rest upon the assumption that copyright law is a barrier to AI training – a falsehood that Big Tech has been pushing in Canberra. Currently, if these companies wish to train an AI tool in Australia, they can. They simply need to ask for permission to use creators' work, and negotiate a fair price for that use. Instead of trying to seek licences to use copyright material – which they've acknowledged is the essential ingredient for their AI tools – foreign multinational corporations are lobbying our government to change our law instead.

The ASA has consulted with the Attorney-General's Department on these proposals, making it clear that 'opt-out' schemes do not deliver on the Prime Minister's promises concerning control and compensation. Weakening copyright law in Australia doesn't address the offshore theft of creators' work – instead, we've called upon the government to **strengthen** Australian copyright law, to give creators the leverage they need to compel licensing for copyright material, irrespective of where the AI model is being trained.

Advocating for greater protections for creators in the AI age, we've made numerous submissions to government consultations on this matter including the Senate Inquiry into Data Centres and AI, the Joint Select Committee on AI, and the Office of AI's Getting it right: Building AI infrastructure that works for Australia consultation.

Alongside a formidable coalition of authors, Dr Anna Funder, Dr Charlotte Wood, and Markus Zusak, the ASA provided evidence to the Joint Select Committee opposing any government plans to water down copyright law for Big Tech. I strongly recommend listening to the testimony the authors provided to the Committee – who could put it better than writers themselves, the injustice in legalising what is described by the AI companies themselves as the 'largest theft of labor in human history'.

In October, we urged Australia's authors and illustrators to write to their local MPs about this issue and help us to raise the alarm. We must come together as a collective to encourage the government to enforce and reinforce our copyright law, rather than weaken it and make professional creative careers even more unsustainable.

This year also saw our publication of updated guidance for authors and illustrators about generative AI, including information about the risks of AI use in the book industry and the development of resources on AI clauses. We know that generative AI use is growing in our sector, and this has implications for trust and integrity in publishing. We encourage authors to get in touch with us via our free Advice Service if you have any questions or concerns about your publisher's use of generative AI in relation to your work.

The Anthropic class action settlement also progressed this year, with some Australian creators included in the class and entitled to compensation. Concerningly, the US Authors Guild has reported on disputes between authors and publishers concerning the appropriate split for the damages payment. If you have questions about your entitlements, please do not hesitate to contact us.

We also continue to hear from members about the explosion of AI-generated scam emails, which are increasingly sophisticated and difficult to detect. The problem seems to be not so much that authors are falling for the scams and losing money, but that the volume of the emails is overwhelming. Creators are concerned that they are missing genuine opportunities in their attempts to deal with the flood of scam emails.

In addition to our work on the National Cultural Policy and AI, we also made submissions to government giving feedback on a proposal to modernise **Australia's classification guidelines**, particularly with the context of book banning and

censorship in mind, and calling for **a reversal of the 2020 Job-Ready Graduates reforms** which have made humanities degrees unaffordable.

This year also commenced with the cancellation of Adelaide Writers' Week – we remain concerned about the ongoing repercussions creators are facing for expressing their political views in public or in their art. The ASA supports freedom of expression within the reasonable limits set by anti-discrimination and other laws. We're here for support and advice, should you require assistance.

Highlights of the year

We ended the financial year with 4,757 members, and the ASA continues to be in a stable and solid financial position. Our audited accounts show a comprehensive income of $182,311 for the 25/26 financial year, driven by strong membership revenue and income from services, and cautious control on our expenses.

Authors Legal

This year to date, Authors Legal has responded to approximately 223 legal and industry requests, and provided 60 legal advices to new and existing clients.

Authors Legal's work is increasingly important – creators are contacting us with increasingly complex and fraught queries, requesting assistance in a short timeframe. The team is fielding evermore queries about generative AI, as well as hear from distressed authors dealing with non-responsive publishers. Overall, Authors Legal is observing a heightened sense of anxiety generally in the creator community.

We encourage all authors and illustrators to seek advice on their contracts before signing – the terms you agree to in your contract will have impacts upon your career and potential income for long after you've signed.

Reconciliation Action Plan

After receiving feedback on our initial draft *Innovate* RAP, we are continuing to work on the next draft. While we finalise our plan, we continue to educate writers and illustrators about Indigenous Cultural and Intellectual Property protocols around consultation and consent, as well as to celebrate Indigenous creative work in our professional development program. During National Reconciliation Week we hosted *Telling First Nations' stories* with Craig Cormick and Darren Rix, which provided a useful example of how to meaningfully engage and consult with community. We also celebrated NAIDOC Week by hosting a free session, *Storytelling for young*

readers: A First Nations panel discussion with Ambelin Kwaymullina, Brooke Scobie, and Jared Thomas.

Australia Reads
At the end of last year Australia Reads was officially established as a not-for-profit entity, and in its first year of operation has secured funding from Writing Australia. The organisation is going from strength to strength under the impressive leadership of CEO, Anna Burkey, hosting an incredibly well-attended reading symposium, *Volume*, the LitUp authors-in-schools program, and a Parliamentary Friends of Books and Reading event which saw over 30 MPs and representatives show up to support a national plan for reading. It is in the best interests of authors, publishers, booksellers, and librarians, that we address declining reading rates in Australia, and the work of Australia Reads is vital to that purpose.

Services, Programs, and Resources

2026 saw the update of our minimum recommended rates of pay for school appearances, comics and freelance writing, as well as the publication of a new rate of pay providing guidance around standard royalty rates in the Australian book industry. We are also due to publish updates to our book illustration rates of pay and new guidance for creators around funding application rates of pay. We publish benchmarks to arm creators with the confidence they need to negotiate for fair remuneration, and when employers and organisations agree to a fair rate of pay, they make it possible for creators – whose work is at the heart of the book industry – to make a living.

We have also delivered practical, informative, and inspiring programming for authors and illustrators this year. Excluding our pitching events, our Professional Development program featured 56 sessions, with a total of 2,064 attendees. These included 7 free sessions, with the most popular being *Understanding readers and their habits* with Australia Reads CEO Anna Burkey and author Karina May, Poetry and the Australian publishing industry: A 2026 snapshot with Red Room Poetry with Alison Barton, Melinda Bufton, Ivor Indyk, and David Stavanger, and *Working through imposter syndrome* with Dr. Ash King from SupportAct.

The ASA hosted three pitching events this year: a Picture Book Matchmaker event in April, and Virtual Literary Speed Dating events in July and October. Across the three events we facilitated a total of 876 pitches, with 351 requests from publishers or agents for material, which is a 40% request rate.

We've also seen a marked increase in the uptake of our professional development services. This year we delivered 27 mentorships, 82 manuscript assessments, and 18 publishing consultancies, engaging 37 authors and industry professionals.

The ASA also published a number of new and updated resources this year, including a practical *Guide to AI clauses* for authors and illustrators. This new resource is designed to help creators negotiate for clauses in their publishing agreements which protect their interests in relation to generative AI use and licensing. Given we know book industry professionals are increasing their use of generative AI tools, it is vital that creators safeguard their rights by addressing AI in their contracts now. We've also updated our template contract agreements to include these AI clauses, including our publishing, literary agent, and ghostwriting agreements.

For emerging creators, we've published a brand new resource on pitching, written by book industry professional, Clare Forster. This comprehensive guide provides fiction and non-fiction, children's writers with information about how to identify opportunities to pitch, what needs to be included in a pitch, and how to write a synopsis.

We have also increased our offering of on-demand video resources this year, publishing *Sensible retirement planning for creators* presented by business and finance journalist, Emily Stewart. Other video resources available for authors include *Do-it-yourself promotion for authors*, *Resilience in creative practice*, and *Understanding and negotiating your publishing contract*.

Awards

ASA Medal
We are pleased to award the 2026 ASA Medal to Tegan Bennett Daylight for her outstanding contribution to the Australian literary community, as both a creator and an advocate.

2026 Barbara Jefferis Award
We are excited to announce the winner of the 2026 Barbara Jefferis Award at the Colin Simpson Memorial Keynote event in Sydney this Tuesday 10 November. The incredible shortlist included:

- Translations by Jumaana Abdu (Penguin Random House Australia)
- Theory and Practice by Michelle de Kretser (Text Publishing)

- Rapture by Emily Maguire (Allen & Unwin)
- The Sun was Electric Light by Rachel Morton (University of Queensland Press)
- A Piece of Red Cloth by Leonie Norrington, Djawundil Maymuru, Merrkiyawuy Ganambarr-Stubbs and Djawa Burarrwanga (Allen & Unwin)
- Out of the Woods by Gretchen Shirm (Transit Lounge)

Blake-Beckett Trust Scholarship
The $35,000 Blake-Beckett Trust Scholarship is offered by the ASA each year to provide a published author with time to work on a current manuscript. The winner receives $35,000, and the runner-up, $15,000.

We are thrilled to be announcing the shortlisted authors on 25 November 2026, and the winner and runner-up on 9 December 2026.

CA/ASA Developmental Leadership Program
The ASA's prestigious and long-running Award Mentorship Program received funding this year from Copyright Agency's Cultural Fund, and was renamed to align with some minor shifts in the focus. In 2026, we awarded 13 fully-funded mentorships, announced in April. Ten 20-hour mentorships have been awarded to writers of fiction, non-fiction, children's and young adult, and three ten-hour mentorships have been awarded to creators of illustrated works. The winners each receive one free ticket to the ASA's Pitch Perfect courses, one free ticket for a Virtual Literary Speed Dating or Picture Book Matchmaker pitch, and one-year's free membership to the ASA We also awarded two highly commended applicants with a three-hour mentorship.

2026 Tasmanian Writers and Illustrators Mentorship Program
With the generous support of Arts Tasmania, in 2026 we awarded sixteen fully-funded mentorships to Tasmanian creators in July. Fourteen 20-hour mentorships have been awarded to writers of fiction, non-fiction, children's and young adult, and two ten-hour mentorships have been awarded to creators of illustrated works. In addition to their mentorships, the winners each receive one free ticket to the ASA's Pitch Perfect courses, one free ticket for a Virtual Literary Speed Dating or Picture Book Matchmaker pitch, and one-year's free membership to the ASA. The ASA also hosted a local Tasmanian community event to celebrate past and present mentees, including author Nadia Mahjouri, whose book, *Half Truth* was supported through the program.

ASA/Varuna Ray Koppe Residency
The 2026 ASA/Varuna Ray Koppe Residency was awarded to Henriette Tkalec for her novel, *Sola*.

Staff and board

Everything we've achieved this year is only possible thanks to the hard work and dedication of the ASA team, including Saranya Agar, Freda Chiu, Mary Colussi, Angeles Galvez, Hellai Gul, and Alison Williams, as well as Authors Legal lawyers, Beth Cox and Lisa McKay. Each and every one of our team contributes to making a material difference in the lives of professional creators, and I know how much our members appreciate their work.

I'd also like to warmly thank Kate Adams, who has departed on parental leave for the coming year, and welcome our covering Professional Development team members, Kelly Doust and Lamisse Hamouda! I know that Kelly and Lamisse's experience, both as authors and within the book industry, will be invaluable to programming that is attuned to the needs of our membership over the next year.

I am also extremely grateful to the ASA Board, who are so generous with their time, knowledge, and experience. An organisation is its people, and the ASA is lucky to have Directors like ours leading the way. In particular, I'd like to thank our Chair, Jen Mills, Treasurer, Jock Given, and Deputy Chair, Dub Leffler – your vision, support, and leadership is the bedrock for everything the ASA is able to accomplish.

Finally, I'd like to thank our members, Australia's writers and illustrators. The ASA exists to promote and protect your interests, and your support makes all of our work possible.