

Executive Summary

The Review was provided with two broad terms of reference:

- To assess the effectiveness of the Premier's Book Awards (PBAs) and the 2008 Premier's Australia Asia Literary Award (AALA) in achieving their objectives and the impact of both award programs for the Western Australian writing community.
- To make recommendations for the future of both award programs including any alternative options to deliver similar outcomes.

Independent research, public submissions, the advice of a reference group and meetings with interested parties, including writers, publishers, the media, book-sellers and the organizers of comparable literary award schemes constituted the body of evidence on which the Review drew its conclusions. The PBAs have been offered in varying formats since 1982, making them one of Australia's oldest literary awards. Managed and administered by the State Library of WA, the Review found that the PBAs had generally been an effective and cost-efficient means of recognizing and show-casing the State's writing talent, and that a large number of writers have benefitted from the awards. However, there was a widespread perception within the writing community that important aspects of the PBA format required updating and that it had not kept pace with the development of an increasingly outward looking WA literature industry. With regard to the AALA, the evidence of a single year of operation, together with the broad objectives of the award, provides little basis to assess effectiveness. However, from the small body of available evidence, the 2008 award appears to have been generally successful.

While there appears to have been a widespread perception that the PBAs required reform, it is the impact of the AALA on the scheme that served to magnify perceptions that the government has not sufficiently valued the efforts, output and success of the domestic writing community. The Review found that many believed that the inaugural AALA resulted in a degraded PBA, and that it was perceived to have brought limited or no benefits to the WA writing community. At the same time, there was widespread approval of the increase in Government financial contributions to literature through the inception of an AALA. Many applauded its introduction as an opportunity for WA to reposition itself through the medium of literature as an active player in Australia and the region, and argued that it should be provided with time to establish itself.

The Reviewers urge the WA Government to maintain the current commitment to a State awards scheme, believing that it is an effective way to:

1. Recognize excellence and reward the best of WA literature, and thereby raise the profile of writing in WA;
2. Provide support and encouragement to the WA writing community in an efficient and equitable way;
3. Expand literary culture in WA and the Indian Ocean region;
4. Expand markets for WA literature both domestically and throughout the Indian Ocean region.
5. Utilize the State's writing industry to consolidate links and partnerships between WA and its Indian Ocean neighbours.

In seeking to conceive a scheme that will reconcile the interests of the WA writing community with the opportunity to extend its horizons nationally and throughout the region, the Review recommends one that is distinctively Western Australian and is oriented to promoting WA writers and writing, encouraging and expanding the literary industry. This, the Review believes, will be achieved by preserving the best aspects of both the AALA and the PBA in a WA Literature Awards scheme. The Review has sought to respond to the need to balance the aims and objectives of the WA writing community with the more outward looking, regionally engaged vision of the AALA. The establishment of a Perth Indian Ocean Literature Prize maintains the intent of the AALA but does so within a more focused and coherent format that emphasizes the connections of WA with the Indian Ocean. The objectives of the WA literature awards are based on themes of place, WA and the Indian Ocean region, and also are designed to recognize excellence in contribution to WA and Indian Ocean literary culture. Introducing new categories to the existing seven expands the scope of the scheme, introduces an element of flexibility into the judging process, and increases opportunities for public involvement and interest in the awards. The recommended scheme also introduces partnerships between the Government, private and non-government through the recommended TAG Hungerford Award for a fiction manuscript and the proposed co-alignment with the Perth Writers Festival. Running the WA literature awards in conjunction with the festival holds out the possibility of increasing the profile of the awards significantly, and including them as part of a week-long event that is

already well-established and attracts a large participation of writers and visitors to WA. Such partnerships provide a basis on which further private and non-government involvement in the awards may be encouraged, including private sponsorships and management arrangements with private sector organizations.

While the Review argues that the recommended scheme would constitute a creative and targeted response by the government to the support of the writing community, and believes it would earn general support, it recognizes that for various reasons, not the least of which relate to costs, the Government may wish to consider alternatives. Three additional options are canvassed, each of which have implications with regard to cost, management and administration. These options are:

1. Continuation of the AALA and the PBAs in their 2008 format for a further two years, in order to provide the former award with sufficient time to establish itself. Various recommendations were made by the Department of Culture and the Arts and the State Library aimed at ironing out some of the problems of the 2008 awards, and these might go some way towards addressing the explicit concerns of key stakeholders in the writing community.
2. A revitalized PBA, in which aspects such as prize money, categories, eligibility and judging are reformed. This option entails an abandonment of the AALA objectives of engaging with WA's regional neighbours through literature. Despite a substantially higher prize pool, it would be substantially cheaper than either the recommended model or the AALA/PBA, partly because it would entail the continued management of the State Library, which has been an extremely cost-effective way of administering the awards since 1982.
3. Continuation of the PBAs in their most recent 2007 and 2008 format, with prize money and categories maintained at their existing levels, but with minor reforms to judging procedures. This option would be the cheapest, but would undoubtedly earn some criticism from the State's writing community, which would undoubtedly continue to press for what are widely considered overdue reforms.