

New Newspoll Research Shows Six in Ten Australians Want New Australian Content Requirements

Wednesday 13 March, 2013

A Newspoll survey conducted for the Australian Writers' Guild last weekend shows that a clear majority of 6 in 10 Australians support additional Australian comedy and drama requirements for the new digital free-to-air channels, and 6 in 10 Australians would find a reduction in the levels of local children's live action content unacceptable.

With Senator Conroy's media reforms package approved yesterday morning by Cabinet, the Minister claimed broad public support as a reason to rush the legislation through Parliament. The Newspoll results indicate that the ALP is out of touch with the views of the Australian public on this issue.

"The ALP claims to understand that seeing Australian stories on Australian screens is vital in reflecting and maintaining our identity, but this legislation simply does not support that claim," says AWG Executive Director Jacqueline Elaine.

"While the commentary around the proposed media reform legislation is focused on the multinationals fighting over ownership issues, there is a real risk of Australia losing its unique cultural identity when it comes to the plethora of emerging digital free-to-air commercial channels," says AWG President Jan Sardi.

The Newspoll results also show that only 3% of Australian adults think there is too much Australian comedy and drama overall, but 43% feel that there is not enough. Similarly, only 5% feel that there is too much live action children's content, but 40% believe there is not enough, and six in ten adults (59%) would not accept moves to reduce the amount of children's live action content below the current 30 minutes per week per channel.

The ALP's own Convergence Review recommended a specific quota for the culturally significant yet commercially vulnerable areas of drama, children's television and documentary for the digital multi-channels. The Newspoll figures show there is widespread majority support for such measures throughout the community. In the 35 and over age group there is a two to one majority of the Australian public who believe these extra channels should have to show a minimum amount of new Australian drama and comedy. But the package being rushed through parliament provides only a loose 'Australian content' requirement which allows cheap reruns to count. It ignores expert review, it ignores the government's own publicly stated opinion, and now it is plain that it also ignores public opinion.

Australian stories are much more expensive to produce than to buy-in ready-made US and international programmes. With three times the number of channels, if these changes are passed by Parliament and become law, history and global evidence tell us that Australian screens will be flooded by American content and Australian stories will be lost in the deluge. The Australian public has been very clear in this research that is not acceptable to them.