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## **Australian Writers' Guild**

### **Submission**

**to the**

### **Australian and Children's Screen Content Review**



Photo Credit: Crawford Productions

28 September 2017

This document is not confidential

*“When a government is elected, it is given a mandate to raise taxes and defend the country.  
It is also given a mandate to be custodians of our culture.  
For our government to say that we should get rid of television quotas,  
it is saying that our culture is not worth promoting or defending.”*

– Mac Gudgeon, Screenwriter  
(*The Secret River, Killing Time, Last Ride, Ground Zero, Waterfront*)

## **WHO WE ARE**

The Australian Writers’ Guild (AWG) is the professional association for Australian screen and stage writers principally in film, television, theatre, radio and digital media. The AWG represents the majority of writers of the scripted screen content that is the subject of this review. The AWG has fought for over 50 years to improve professional standards, conditions and remuneration for Australian stage and screenwriters, to pursue a thriving stage and screen industry environment, and to protect and advance the creative rights of our members. Our vision is to see stage and screenwriters thrive as a dynamic and integral part of Australian storytelling: shaping, reflecting and enhancing the Australian cultural voice in all its diversity.

The AWG has been instrumental in protecting and supporting Australian and children’s content for over 50 years, including the introduction of quotas on commercial television in the 1960s and 1970s and being pivotal to the introduction of the *New Eligible Drama Expenditure* for subscription television in the late 1990s.

## **EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

Government intervention in the screen content industry should be highly targeted to where the market cannot provide the cultural objectives and public good that government is committed to.

Scripted screen content is both the most culturally significant, and the most economically vulnerable. There is incontrovertible evidence, both domestic and international, that local scripted content cannot survive outside Hollywood and Bollywood without targeted government intervention. The economic reality of international trade in screen content is one which would equate to dumping were intellectual property considered a good, and the local industry would therefore be protected. Without anti-dumping measures to rely on, the industry cannot compete with multi-million dollar products with global name recognition, developed, marketed and distributed by some of the largest tri-national corporations in the world, selling that content into the Australian market in competition with local content, for a tiny fraction of the cost of production.

The anomalies of an international market where the marginal cost to the producer for each additional sale is zero require a mix of policy and investment measures to ensure that local stories continue to be seen on Australian screens and are not flooded by either Hollywood content or content from territories who are supporting local content through targeted public investment and regulation.

## **INTRODUCTION**

We welcome the opportunity to contribute to the Review and appreciate your consultation on these issues. We understand that the review will also consider submissions and findings of previous related reviews and we refer you to our submission to the 2017 House Standing Committee on Communications and the Arts for their enquiry into *Factors contributing to the growth and sustainability of the Australian film and television industry* and the 2012 *Convergence Review* as many of the same issues were examined therein.

For the purposes of this current enquiry, the AWG asks you to consider the following:

1. Preserve existing sub-quotas on commercial broadcasters for new scripted drama, children's content and documentaries;
2. Introduce regulation on subscription video on demand (SVOD), online and telecommunications companies which imposes obligations on them to invest in production and showcase new Australian scripted drama and children's content;
3. Increase the Producer Offset for television from 20% to 40% and ensure it is clearly and transparently directed toward its proper purpose of supporting Australian originated screen stories;
4. Ensure funding of the ABC and SBS is at a level that enables them to properly support and promote the creation of new Australian scripted drama, children's content and documentary programming in accordance with their respective charters, and incorporate quotas to ensure clarity and transparency in expenditure on scripted content.

In addition, we would like to share the views of some of the screenwriters we represent and the children, parents and educators who will be directly impacted by any changes made to media regulation in Australia.

## **WHAT AUSTRALIAN CONTENT TYPES OR FORMATS IS THE MARKET LIKELY TO DELIVER AND/OR FAIL TO DELIVER IN THE ABSENCE OF GOVERNMENT SUPPORT?**

In the absence of government intervention, the commercial networks will continue to produce reality, sports, news and light entertainment programs.

These types of shows are independently economically viable, and indeed can be lucrative. They present broadcasters with the opportunity to use the public spectrum as an oligopolistic marketing platform to introduce their products and branding to potential audiences. Further, they present an opportunity to recapture advertising revenue which has declined with the proliferation of advertising vehicles with in-show product placements and exclusive partnerships with large corporations.

Reality shows like *The Block* or *MasterChef Australia* are much cheaper to make than scripted shows; can be sold internationally for retransmission or to international networks

who may wish to remake the format for their own market; achieve ample advertising revenue from extensive product placement and tie-ins; and are thus financially viable products which are used for brand marketing for the network and its other products.

Looking towards sports, Australia is a nation filled with armchair sportspeople. Sports are widely played, attended and watched on television. The current anti-siphoning scheme was introduced to ensure Australian people have access to major sporting events, such as the Olympics and AFL and NRL grand finals. It also ensures that free-to-air broadcasters enjoy a government protection which gives them an advantage over Foxtel, SVOD, online or telecommunications competitors when it comes to major sporting events. If the government were to abolish the anti-siphoning scheme, commercial television broadcasters would continue to pay huge sums of money to acquire the rights to broadcast major sporting events because in a time of declining advertising revenue, these events attract huge audience numbers and are therefore extremely attractive to advertisers who will need to pay the commercial networks large sums of money for advertising during these broadcasts. Sporting events are not a format that needs government intervention because the market is and will always be self-sustaining.

News and light entertainment are also far cheaper to make than scripted drama, and will always be a desirable and affordable part of the television landscape.

Conversely, there is absolutely no doubt that commercial broadcasters will stop producing new scripted drama, children's programs and documentaries in the absence of government intervention in the form of sub-quotas for these types of content. In the five years to 2016, commercial broadcasters' expenditure on drama, documentaries and children's programming remained stagnant or decreased while investment in news, sport and light entertainment programming increased.<sup>1</sup>

If the cultural imperative to make scripted drama, children's content and documentaries is removed, leaving only commercial decision-making, the evidence shows that local scripted content will quickly disappear.

In 2003, the United Kingdom government downgraded children's content from Tier 2 to Tier 3 in response to Public Service Broadcasters (PSB) complaints that it was no longer economically viable to make in an age where the advertising revenue it generated was significantly lower than other areas of programming. PSB no longer had to meet their quantitative targets for children's programming. From 2003 to 2013 this resulted in a 93% reduction in children's content on television.<sup>2</sup>

This is an example of the dramatic and rapid impact of softening TV content quota obligations for culturally significant content in failed markets. It demonstrates that when broadcasters

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<sup>1</sup> ACMA, Broadcasting Financial Results 2009-2010 to 2014-2015, <http://acma.gov.au/theACMA/Library/Industry-library/Broadcasting/broadcasting-financial-results-report>

<sup>2</sup> Pett, William, *Save Kids Content Announces Campaign Launch in Parliament*, 24 June 2016, [savekidscontent.org.uk/news/save-kids-content-announces-campaign-launch-in-parliament](http://savekidscontent.org.uk/news/save-kids-content-announces-campaign-launch-in-parliament)

are not required to provide certain types of content, they won't, even when that content is seen as culturally significant, in the public interest and attracting excellent local ratings. After a long, noisy and hard-fought campaign by Save Kids' Content UK, change has occurred and the UK is now spending taxpayer money to seek to reinstate children's content to former levels.

For over 40 years, quotas have ensured that culturally significant content such as scripted drama, children's television and documentaries have been available for the benefit of all Australians. Apart from creating jobs and revenue, such iconic shows have promoted Australian identity and culture at home and on the international stage. We need to learn from the mistakes of the UK and not repeat them. Value cannot always be measured in dollars.

### **WHAT TYPES OF AUSTRALIAN SCREEN CONTENT SHOULD BE SUPPORTED BY AUSTRALIAN GOVERNMENT INCENTIVES AND/OR REGULATION?**

As outlined above, a deregulated media market will fail to deliver the screen content that is the most culturally significant – scripted drama, children's content and documentaries. These types of content should be protected by the Australian Government as part of the government mandate to act as custodians of Australian culture, for and on behalf of Australians of all ages, now and into the future.

#### **SCRIPTED DRAMA**

Scripted drama forms part of the fabric of Australian culture and shared experience like no other form of television can. The ability to create characters, places, mise-en-scène and dialogue from an Australian perspective and sensibility is extremely powerful. Australian audiences welcome these characters into their lives night after night for real, lasting impact and they form part of a cultural canon which both reflects and shapes our cultural identity.

Scripted drama is, of necessity, the most expensive audio-visual content to produce. With average budgets of AUD\$1.1 million per hour, it requires government intervention to ensure its very existence into the future. The fact remains that commercial broadcasters in Australia can acquire a high-quality drama series from the US with a production budget of US \$6 million per episode, higher production values, marketing hype and critical acclaim for a fraction of what it costs to make one episode of local Australian scripted drama. As stated earlier, Australian commercial broadcasters can also make an episode of a reality or light entertainment program for less than half the cost of making one episode of local Australian scripted drama. With no government compulsion to make scripted drama, the commercial broadcasters will serve only their commercial interest and shareholders and focus on the types of low-risk, cheaper-to-make content that is most likely to return on investment at the expense of scripted drama.

#### **CHILDREN'S CONTENT**

Under the *United Nations' Convention on the Rights of the Child*, children have a right to access information of social, cultural and linguistic benefit via mass media. Australian children have a right to see themselves reflected on Australian screens and the Australian Government

has a responsibility to ensure that we have stories and a culture of our own to pass on to future generations. Without government intervention, the screens of Australian children, as well as their hearts and minds, will be filled instead with foreign content and accents and the valuable social, cultural and educational role that quality locally produced children's content plays in our society will be lost forever. Any dreams of a career in the television and film industry will be crushed as the opportunity to learn craft from the ground up on local productions will also be lost, along with new generations of writers, directors, actors, producers, cinematographers, sound and post designers.

Commercial broadcasters are already doing the bare minimum when it comes to children's content. Looking at the five-year average from 2012 to 2016, Channel 7 and Network Ten are only just meeting existing quotas for children's content and Network Nine is failing to meet its obligations for first-release Australian children's programs. All are making just one hour in excess of the 130 hours required for all Australian preschool programs.<sup>3</sup> This equates to each of the commercial broadcasters making approximately 2.5 hours of first-release Australian children's content per week. The commercial broadcasters made their intentions on children's content clear when they successfully lobbied the government to be allowed to use secondary channels to broadcast Australian children's content in order to create the self-fulfilling prophecy that Australian children were not watching it, so they shouldn't be forced to make it anymore. This current push to abolish quotas is the final stage in this strategy. The arguments that advertising revenue is low as a result of restrictions imposed on this demographic and timeslot can be supported, but when taken as a whole represents only a tiny, economically insignificant loss of revenue because of the timeslots and the number of hours it affects. This is far outweighed by the advertising benefits gained by the significant number of hours and advertising revenue attached to the use of the public spectrum for other content, in particular sport content supported by anti-siphoning measures.

**THE CURRENT SYSTEM OF SUPPORT FOR SCREEN CONTENT INVOLVES QUOTAS, MINIMUM EXPENDITURE REQUIREMENTS, TAX INCENTIVES AND FUNDING. WHAT ARE THE STRENGTHS AND WEAKNESSES OF THE CURRENT SYSTEM? WHAT REFORMS WOULD YOU SUGGEST?**

**QUOTAS ON COMMERCIAL NETWORKS**

The requirement for intervention and protection of content is a necessary reality for most countries, especially those in English language territories who have to compete with the behemoth that is the United States, a country where the huge size of the market can sustain content with high budgets and produce a superior quality product in the same language we speak and export shows to Australia for, effectively, a zero marginal cost.

The ability and opportunity to tell Australian stories, from our own perspective and in our own voice was the result of a nationally significant public campaign: the *TV: Make It Australian* campaign in the 1960s and 1970s when Australian shows represented just 1% of content shown on television. The battle was won and local content quotas were introduced. According to Hector Crawford, having more Australian content on our screens would "make a vital

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<sup>3</sup> ACMA, *Australian Content Compliance Results 2012-2016*

contribution to the development of a specifically Australian consciousness and sense of National Identity.”<sup>4</sup> This is central to the purpose of public policy in our industry.

Since their introduction, quotas for commercial television broadcasters have provided space on our screens for successful, high-quality, scripted Australian programs such as *Number 96*, *Prisoner*, *A Country Practice*, *Neighbours*, *Home and Away*, *Acropolis Now*, *Blue Heelers*, *Round the Twist*, *The Secret Life of Us*, *SeaChange*, *Blue Heelers*, *Offspring* that have connected with Australian and international audiences.

Similarly, the *Broadcasting Services Act 1992* requires subscription television licensees that broadcast drama channels, and drama channel package providers, to invest at least 10% of their total program expenditure on new Australian drama. While expenditure on new Australian drama programs has increased year on year since 2012/2013,<sup>5</sup> it is important to note that the qualifying content that subscription television invested in over this period included *Mad Max: Fury Road*, *Top of the Lake*, *The Kettering Incident*, *Wentworth*, *Mako Mermaids*, *Deadline Gallipoli*, *Red Dog* and *Bran Nue Dae*, projects that were commercially successful in Australia and in international markets. Subscription television providers have a clear commercial motivation to make this content at this time, but it is important to remember that this obligation was introduced after successful lobbying by the AWG because they were not making it off their own backs. Put simply, when the content ceases to make money, they will stop making it if not required to do so. Existing quotas on commercial broadcasters to produce new scripted drama, children’s content and documentaries must be preserved.

## PLATFORM NEUTRAL REGULATION

Perhaps the biggest weakness in the current system is that it is not fit for purpose in this new age of digital content. The current system of quotas was introduced long before the advent of streaming video on demand services, such as Stan, Netflix and Amazon Prime, or video-sharing platforms, such as YouTube and telecommunications companies, became content providers alongside the traditional television networks in a convergent media landscape.

Australian commercial networks must comply with quotas, Foxtel must comply with a minimum expenditure on local content, government broadcasters must create local content under their respective charters, but the new digital market entrants have absolutely no obligation at all to contribute to the local market.

To use just one example of Netflix, in June 2017, Roy Morgan reported that 7.091 million Australians aged 14 and over had access to Netflix in the three months to March 2017. This is a 29% increase on the previous quarter. An estimated 2,714,000 Australian homes are now

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<sup>4</sup> Given, Jock, “*Did the Networks Kill Homicide?*”, Inside Story, 2 July 2014

<sup>5</sup> ACMA, *New Eligible Drama Expenditure Scheme Results, 2015-16*, <http://www.acma.gov.au/Industry/Broadcast/Television/Australian-content/new-eligible-drama-expenditure-scheme-results-i-acma>

Netflix subscribers.<sup>6</sup> With the minimum subscription in Australia costing consumers AUD\$9.99 per month, Netflix revenue from the Australian market could be well in excess of AUD\$325 million per annum from subscriptions alone. But, despite making these huge sums of money from exploiting the Australian market, Netflix has no staff in Australia, with even its technical support run remotely from the USA, and, to date, while they have previously bought second-window, international distribution rights on Australian television series such as *The Legend of Monkey*, *Glitch* and *Beat Bugs*, it should not be forgotten that these rights are valuable for Netflix in the multiple international territories they cover and have the potential to make them even more money when the rights are exploited and cross-collateralised. Netflix have also recently announced a direct commission for one original Australian television series, *Tidelands*, and been the major investor in another, *Pine Gap*, so while they are now spending money in the Australian market, it is a drop in the ocean in the context of how much they are making from subscriptions and stand to make from the international rights. Netflix reportedly plans to spend over USD\$8 billion on content in 2017 alone,<sup>7</sup> so the Australian Government should be asking how much of that will be spent in Australia and how much could be spent if Netflix were obliged to commit to new Australian production in the same way its competitors are?

The media regulation framework in Australia needs to evolve to ensure there is a level playing field. But the playing field must not be levelled by deregulation. All content providers should be regulated by the Australian Government to ensure that they have an obligation to produce new local Australian and children's content and give back to the Australian audiences they are exploiting for huge profits. New players like Netflix also benefit from oligopolistic market conditions so the Australian Government should ensure that there is a trade-off and benefit to the Australian people for that.

With their *Audiovisual Media Services Directive*, the European Parliament has recently set content quotas for video services like Netflix and Amazon Prime. With a requirement that 30% of their catalogue must be European works, this obligation is even higher than the 20% originally requested by the European Commission.<sup>8</sup> Member states will also be permitted to impose a levy on the streamers, though Netflix is challenging these in the European General Court.

Australia should look closely at what Europe has been able to achieve and should introduce a new levy on subscription video on demand (SVOD), online and telecommunications companies to impose an obligation on them to produce new Australian scripted drama and children's content.

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<sup>6</sup> Roy Morgan Subscription Video On Demand Estimates, June 2017.  
(<http://www.roymorgan.com/findings/7242-netflix-subscriptions-march-2017-201706080957>)

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid*

<sup>8</sup> European Commission, *Audiovisual Media Services Directive*, May 2017  
(<https://ec.europa.eu/digital-single-market/en/policies/audiovisual-media-services>)



## PRODUCER OFFSET FOR TELEVISION

To date, the producer offset has been extremely effective in driving high-quality, scripted drama production. The qualifying requirement that key creatives such as writers are Australian ensures professional opportunities for Australian writers and other key creatives. It also guarantees Australian audiences ongoing access to Australian content.

However, under the current system the producer offset for television is not set at an appropriate level to allow sufficient local production and to stave off competition from neighbouring countries like New Zealand and Malaysia, who can offer more attractive incentives to producers to take their television shows and valuable intellectual property offshore.

Australian feature films attract a producer's offset of 40%, which is double what is offered to qualifying television productions. We understand this disparity was originally put in place because the budgets for feature film were comparatively higher than television and feature film finance harder for producers to raise. However, with current Australian television drama budgets sitting around AUD\$1.1 million per hour and with many series consisting of 6 to 12 episodes per season, the budgets are now comparable to and in most cases actually exceed the budgets for Australian feature films. It therefore makes sense for the producer's offset for television to be brought to parity with the Australian feature film incentive.

Research by PricewaterhouseCoopers ("the PwC report") commissioned by the production and pay TV industries estimates that over AUD\$100 million in economic activity would be created if the producer's offset for television production was doubled and that the cost to the Australian Government would only be "a maximum of \$15.5 million in foregone tax revenue". The PwC report estimates that 360 new television production jobs would be created and said Australia's international competitiveness in the global screen production and finance industry would be "significantly enhanced".

The AWG supports the increase in the producer's offset for television over any increase in the location offset as those productions do not have to satisfy the "significant Australian content test", which ensures that Australian stories can continue to be told by Australian writers for global audiences and is what differentiates industry protectionism from support for Australian culture and stories with all the attendant second-tier economic and social benefits. The beneficiaries of the location offset tend to be large, wealthy trans-national production companies who provide sporadic investment in jobs and skills in return for large public subsidies, without any obligation to contribute more broadly, which is the case with the producer offset.

The AWG recommends an increase in the producer offset for television from 20% to 40%.

## DIRECT FUNDING OF ABC AND SBS

In addition, while not subject to the same local content quotas as the commercial television broadcasters, SBS and ABC have continued to make a contribution, ensuring Australian audiences have the opportunity to see themselves reflected on screen and have their stories told.

In complying with their obligation to provide programming which reflects Australia's multi-cultural society, SBS has given Australian audiences *Wilfred*, *East West 101*, *Housos* and *Deep Water*, all shows which could not have been made anywhere else but in Australia.

The ABC's charter requires it to broadcast programs that "contribute to a sense of national identity and inform and entertain, and reflect the cultural diversity of, the Australian community" and this has given both Australian and international audiences uniquely Australian shows such as *Mother and Son*, *Kath & Kim*, *Summer Heights High*, *Dance Academy*, *Redfern Now*, *The Slap*, *Please Like Me*, *Rake* and *Cleverman* which have not only been successful in Australia, but have also sold and been enjoyed all over the world.

With both SBS and ABC reliant on direct funding from the Australian Government, none of these shows would have been possible without government support. With funding to these organisations being drastically reduced year on year, their investment in new Australian content is also falling and while national broadcasters serve a vital function in the media landscape, for one of these broadcasters to become the only source of quality Australian and children's content would spell disaster for the industry and result in a drastic reduction in the supply and demand for and the value of the content being made.

Accordingly, the AWG recommends an increase in direct funding to ABC and SBS, specifically for new Australian scripted content, along with expenditure and reporting requirements on the investment in these areas.

IN THEIR OWN WORDS – SCREENWRITERS

JAN SARDI



Jan Sardi is one of Australia's eminent screenwriters. In 1997 he received an Academy Award nomination for his screenplay for *Shine*, as well as nominations for BAFTA, the Writers Guild of America, and the Golden Globes. In 2003 he wrote and directed *Love's Brother*, an award-winning Australian/UK production. He also adapted the hit films *The Notebook* and *Mao's Last Dancer* for the screen. His most recent project is *The Secret River*, a two-part miniseries for the ABC, based on the novel by Kate Grenville.

WHAT IS YOUR FAVOURITE AUSTRALIAN TV SHOW?

If you go back to when I was younger, certainly *Homicide* was the first time I saw Australian voices, Australian streets and Australian attitudes on screen and I thought that was fabulous. I also never missed an episode of *Skippy* and more recently, I think we are making world-class drama such as *Seven Types of Ambiguity* which I thought was brilliant and could compete with any drama anywhere in the world.

HOW DID AUSTRALIAN TELEVISION HELP YOU BUILD YOUR OWN CAREER?

I used to be a school teacher and I had written a couple of things, a film which I was lucky enough to get made, but I knew that in order to be able to survive as a writer and tell the kinds of stories I wanted to tell, I needed to get into regular work and I managed to break into television over here. I worked on *The Flying Doctors*, *Embassy*, *Phoenix*, *Halifax f.p.*, a lot of great Australian shows which helped build the industry and my own career in many ways in those early years.

WHY SHOULD ONLINE COMPANIES CONTRIBUTE AND PRODUCE NEW AUSTRALIAN CONTENT?

There's many eyeballs on screens at the moment and many different types of screens. If we want Australian stories and want our kids to grow up with Australian stories, and to know a little bit about what it means to be Australian, we must be able to tell Australian stories. That won't happen with this tsunami of foreign content that is landing every day in their hearts and minds and souls.

WHAT DO YOU THINK WILL HAPPEN TO THE AUSTRALIAN TELEVISION INDUSTRY IF LOCAL AND KIDS CONTENT QUOTAS ON COMMERCIAL TELEVISION NETWORKS ARE ABOLISHED?

If quotas are abolished, that will be the end of Australian stories. There won't be any compulsion to make Australian drama. Foreign content gets dumped on Australian audiences because it is already paid for overseas and comes here cheap and in profit already. Many years ago, when the advertising standards regulations were removed, the broadcasters said at that time "we will self-regulate and continue to have 7 minutes of ads per hour". I remember I went along with many other guild stalwarts to argue against the dropping of these regulations, but now I think a commercial hour of television drama is 42 minutes instead of 53 minutes as it was back then. So much for self-regulation. Unless the networks are made to do it, they won't, and it's really up to us to fight this fight again, to ensure that all Australians can continue to enjoy and celebrate their own culture through the stories we tell.



#### ANDREW KNIGHT

Andrew Knight is a multi-award-winning Australian writer and producer. Andrew has written for both international and Australian features, and written, produced, co-created or executive-produced more than 1000 hours of television. Andrew's credits include co-writing and co-producing the latest instalments in the *Jack Irish* and *Rake* series, both for ABC. He co-wrote *Ali's Wedding* with Osamah Sami, AWGIE-Award winning *The Water Diviner* with Andrew Anastasios, and *Hacksaw Ridge* with Robert Schenkkan for director Mel Gibson. Other iconic titles Andrew has been involved with include *After the Deluge*, *Kangaroo Palace*, *SeaChange*, *The D-Generation*, *Siam Sunset*, *Fast Forward*, and *The Broken Shore*.

#### WHAT IS YOUR FAVOURITE AUSTRALIAN TV SHOW?

Two series that I really liked and that kicked everything off for me in the 1970s were *Rush* and *Power Without Glory*. It was the first time I had heard Australian voices on screen and, at that time, they captured something I wasn't seeing on American or English television. I think that for Australians to see shows that we make about ourselves, that talk about ourselves, is vitally important.

#### HOW DID AUSTRALIAN TELEVISION HELP YOU BUILD YOUR OWN CAREER?

Like many television writers, I started out in sketch comedy. It's a national crime that we don't currently have a great sketch series run by young people for young people where kids are allowed to make mistakes and learn their craft as I was able to do. In today's landscape where 13-part limited series are the norm, it's very hard to risk a lot of money on first-time writers so opportunities are already being lost to nurture new talent. It's a great training ground and we need more of them.

#### WHY SHOULD ONLINE COMPANIES CONTRIBUTE AND PRODUCE NEW AUSTRALIAN CONTENT?

If foreign-owned Subscription Video On Demand services, online and telecommunications companies want to come to Australia, they have to be obliged to make new Australian content otherwise we just become a dumping ground for everyone else's product. It's got to work both ways. Many of those companies are doing really exciting programs so we have to convince them that we can make just as exciting programs here but it has to be mandated as they won't do enough if left to their own devices.

#### WHAT DO YOU THINK WILL HAPPEN TO THE AUSTRALIAN TELEVISION INDUSTRY IF LOCAL AND KIDS CONTENT QUOTAS ON COMMERCIAL TELEVISION NETWORKS ARE ABOLISHED?

If the local content quotas are abolished, it will be a disaster because there is absolutely no way that there will be an industry left. People like me and others who have been around for a while might get the odd gig but we will lose the formats that are the training ground for young talent.

We absolutely need quotas for local content in Australia because who are we if we don't tell stories which are about us? The world is absolutely dominated by American product and international shows. It's good product too but it is so important to our national identity to define the country that we live in and to define who we are and to tell stories about who we are to each other.

IN THEIR OWN WORDS – CHILDREN, PARENTS & TEACHERS

“Chris Lilley is really funny. I watch *Ja'mie Private Schoolgirl* and *Jonah From Tonga* over and over again. It reminds me so much of people from my school. I don't watch reality TV at all because the same thing happens over and over again each week and I find that really boring.”

– Eloise, 16

“The only thing I watch on our big TV is sports. I watch a lot of videos on YouTube. My favourite is *PewDiePie*. He's a Swedish guy who plays games online and makes funny comments and stuff. All of my friends watch him and other gamer videos too.”

– Alexander, 12

“I like *Beat Bugs*. My favourite song is the one about the yellow submarine.”

– Matisse, 5

“Harvey wakes up at the crack of dawn and heads straight to the television to watch *The Wiggles*. He loves *The Wiggles* so much and, like my own kids did, he watches the same episodes over and over again. He knows all the songs and dance moves.”

– Suzanne, mother of four adult children and grandmother of 14-month-old Harvey.

“As a mother of four children, I don't have a lot of time to watch much television but I do enjoy documentaries when I have the chance to watch them. Recently, I've noticed there don't seem to be as many documentaries as there used to be. My five-year-old daughter will often speak with an American accent and I often hear my students use American words like ketchup, trash can, candy and cookies which shows there is already too much exposure to foreign content and culture available for Australian children. As a nation, we don't want to ignore the broader world around us, but I think it's really important for there to be space on screens for kids to be able to see Australian stories too so that they can come to an understanding of what it means to be Australian and see and hear kids just like them on screen.”

- Karyn, Special Education Teacher and mother of four children aged between 5 and 16 years.

## **CONCLUSION**

We strongly urge the Australian Government to have the courage to stand up to those putting commerce before culture and take the steps necessary to provide protection for the Australian industry.

We must always remember that government intervention in the screen industry is and should always be motivated by more than just economics, market and job protectionism. It is, and should always be, driven by a cultural imperative to tell Australian stories to Australian audiences.

Without smart, forward-thinking government intervention that is relevant to the age in which we live, we risk living under a legislative and policy framework that is constantly trailing technology and a disincentive to create. In a deregulated environment, we will lose not only valuable revenue, jobs and opportunities for growth, but also our national identity and culture and because of the Free Trade Agreement, once it is gone, it will be lost forever.

*"They took the credit for you second symphony  
Rewritten by machine on new technology  
And now I understand the problems you can see  
Oh a oh  
I met your children  
Oh a oh  
What did you tell them?  
Video killed the radio star...  
In my mind and in my car,  
We can't rewind we've gone too far..."*

-Video Killed the Radio Star, The Buggles.

For further information on this submission or to discuss the issues further, please do not hesitate to contact us.

Yours sincerely,



**Wendy Howell**  
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