



Submission from Screenworks to:

Media Reform Green Paper – Modernising television regulation in Australia

November 2020

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Screenworks supports the Australian Government to undertake reforms of the regulatory framework that ensures access to Australian stories available on screens for Australian audiences and a viable screen production industry that provides employment and business opportunities, especially in regional, rural and remote Australia.

Screenworks has reviewed the Australian Government's *Media Reform Green Paper* and has prepared this submission in response to the proposals and questions raised within that document.

Screenworks is a registered non-profit charity that provides support, leadership and vision for the regional screen industries (film, television, online and games development) across Australia. Screenworks is a membership-based incorporated association managed by a board of directors that provides industry, management and screen industry knowledge and experience. Our membership is primarily made up of people who work in the film & TV industry in regional Australia.

A vibrant media industry is essential for the economic and cultural health of regional Australia. This includes the creation of regional media jobs and connecting regional people globally. Regulatory levers that support investment in regional Australian content and talent are very important to achieving social, cultural and economic policy and benefits in regional communities.

Screenworks supports the creation of two new funds capitalised from the auction of digital dividend spectrum – namely the “Public Interest News Gathering Trust” and “Create Australian Screen Trust”. Screenworks strongly recommends that allocations in both funds be set aside for the commissioning of regional Australian content and content created by First Nations people living in regional Australia and that regional Australians and First Nations people are represented as trustees.

Screenworks supports the Government's proposal to designate an Australian content investment obligation for large Subscription Video-on-Demand (SVOD) and Advertising Video-on-Demand (AVOD) services. This obligation should require eligible SVOD and AVOD services to invest 20% of their Australian-sourced revenue into commissioning new Australian drama, documentary and children's content.

Screenworks recommends that the obligations have minimum requirements for eligible SVOD and AVOD services to engage with the independent production sector and include a focus on production that will take place outside the metropolitan centres and content from First Nations people across all of Australia.

ABOUT SCREENWORKS

Screenworks is a registered charity that provides support, leadership and vision for the regional screen industries (film, television, online and games development) across Australia. Screenworks is a not-for-profit, membership-based incorporated association managed by a board of directors that provide industry, management and screen industry knowledge and experience.

Screenworks has over twenty-years of experience providing industry development and networking opportunities and services for regional screen content creators and workers, which are delivered online and across regional Australia, with a particular focus on the Northern Rivers region in NSW (the largest hub of regional screen practitioners in Australia).

Each year, we deliver a diverse and relevant range of professional development workshops, seminars and events covering the business and creative sides of all aspects of the Australian screen industry. Demand for and attendance at our professional development programs/events continue to grow annually and remain high, which has been demonstrated by solid attendance at recent Screenworks events and the quality of presenters agreeing to speak at our events.

In addition to our professional and industry development activities, Screenworks also provides industry connections and opportunities, crew referrals and location support for regional productions, promotions and communications relevant to the regional screen industries and advocate on behalf of our members.

Northern Rivers Screenworks Inc is registered as a charity with the Australian Charities and Not-for-profits Commission (ABN 87 095 440 458).

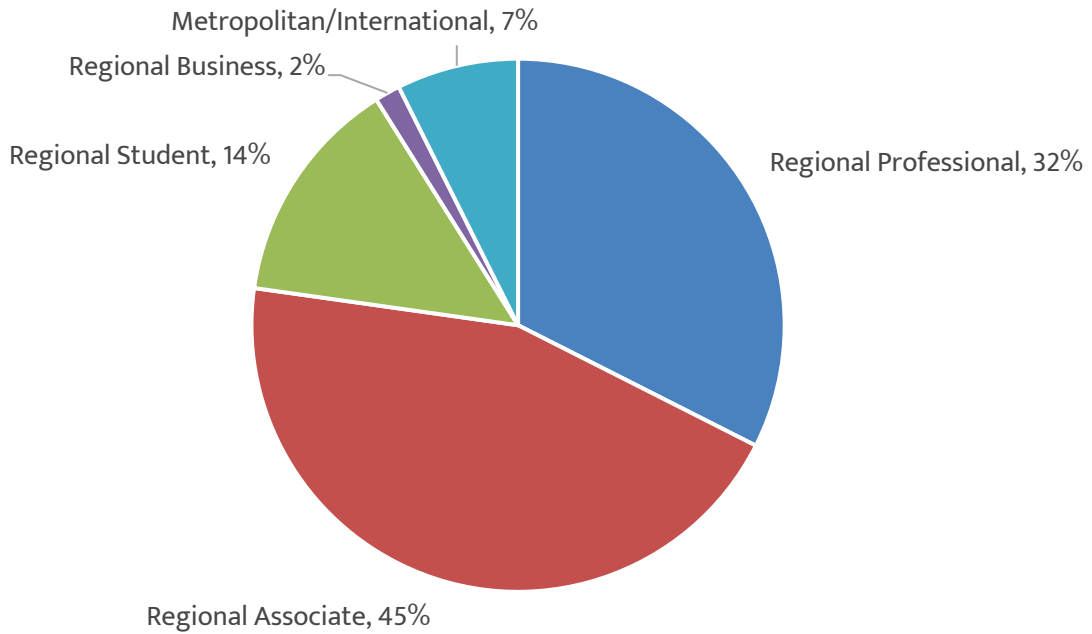
About our members

Screenworks' membership is primarily made up of people who work in the film & TV industry in regional Australia. Our members are part of a growing community of screen practitioners in regional Australia who benefit from Screenworks representing the regional screen industry at a state, national and international level, facilitating industry connections and advocating for regional screen industry development and growth.

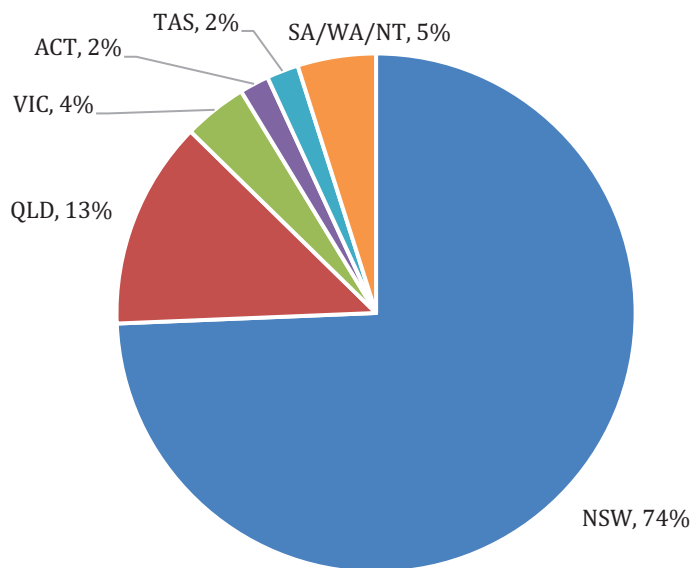
Having started in the Northern Rivers region of NSW in 2000, we have now grown significantly especially over the past 4 years since our membership has been opened up to all businesses and residents living in regional, rural and remote areas of Australia. As a result, our membership represents individuals living in every state and territory of Australia.

Members include producers and directors of screen content across all platforms, highly experienced production professionals (designers, art department, lighting, camera, sound, makeup and hair, wardrobe, locations, unit and post-production) as well as emerging practitioners and screen and audio students at educational institutions across Australia.

Current national member breakdown by category (as at 1 May 2021)



Current national member breakdown by state (as at 1 May 2021)



RESPONSE TO GREEN PAPER

Introduction

Screenworks supports the Australian Government to undertake reforms of the regulatory framework that ensures access to Australian stories available on screens for Australian audiences and a viable Australian screen production industry that provides employment and business opportunities, especially in regional, rural and remote Australia.

Screenworks acknowledges that the current Australian regulatory framework is out of date and needs to be changed so that it:

- supports ongoing investment in commissioning new Australian drama, documentary and children's content;
- has minimum requirements to engage with the independent production sector and include a focus on people living outside the metropolitan centres and First Nations people across Australia;
- reduces the regulatory imbalance between free-to-air television and internet-based competitors; and
- establishes new funds to support the provision of more regional news and documentary, drama and children's content.

Screenworks has reviewed the Australian Government's *Media Reform Green Paper* and emphasises the importance of making regional Australian stories available on our screens to reflect who we are as a nation to ourselves and to the world. Regional Australian stories, voices and perspectives continue to be popular with global audiences and supports cultural identity, social cohesion and connects all Australian citizens.

A vibrant media industry is essential for the economic and cultural health of regional Australia. This includes the creation of regional media jobs and connecting regional people globally. Regulatory levers that support investment in regional Australian content and talent are very important to achieving social, cultural and economic policy and benefits in regional communities.

Screenworks believes that the regulatory framework should highlight that:

- regional Australian screen stories are important culturally, socially and economically;
- our Australian stories should be available and easily discoverable on the screens we watch; and
- regulation and incentives must be fit for purpose and focused on building our industry across all of Australia.

Creation of new funds capitalised by the auction of digital dividend spectrum

Screenworks supports the establishment of two new funds that will provide capital for the provision of newspaper, radio, television and online news services in regional Australian news (Public Interest News Gathering Trust - PING) and documentary, drama and children's content (Create Australian Screen Trust - CAST). These funds would be created from the proceeds of the auction of digital dividend spectrum as set out in the *Media Reform Green Paper*.

Screenworks strongly recommends that a portion of annual CAST allocation should be set aside for the commissioning of regional Australian content and content created by First Nations people living in regional Australia.

Screenworks also recommends that regional Australians and First Nations people who live in regional Australia are represented on the trustees of the CAST fund.

Australian content investment obligation for SVOD and AVOD services

Screenworks supports the Australian Government's proposal to designate an Australian content investment obligation for large Subscription Video-on-Demand (SVOD) and Advertising Video-on-Demand (AVOD) services that meet clearly articulated eligibility requirements.

Screenworks recommends that these obligations are applied to eligible SVOD and AVOD services whose primary purpose is to provide professionally produced content delivered over the internet to Australians that meet the following requirements:

- at least 500,000 subscribers or registered users
- at least \$50 million per annum in Australian revenue
- no exemption for services owned by a corporate structure that also owns a broadcasting licence.

This obligation should require eligible SVOD and AVOD services to invest 20% of their Australian-sourced revenue into commissioning new Australian content. Screenworks recommends that this investment is for commissioning new Australian content and not the acquisition of Australian content. The obligations imposed on SVOD and AVOD services should also require a sub-quota obligation to commission drama, documentary and children's content.

Screenworks recommends that the obligations have minimum requirements for eligible SVOD and AVOD services to engage with the independent production sector and a focus on production that will take place outside the metropolitan centres and content from First Nations people across all of Australia.

Screenworks supports the obligations on SVOD and AVOD services to make Australian content discoverable to Australian audiences.

SVOD and AVOD services should be required to report to the Australian Communications and Media Authority (ACMA) on all obligations set by the Australian Government.

Objectives driving Screenworks' response to this paper

Screenworks' response to the *Media Reform Green Paper* is again based on the consideration of important objectives that were highlighted in our response to the Options Paper in 2020, namely:

- Ensuring access to Australian stories for Australian audiences on all platforms and genres; of telling Australian stories in all their diversity – including regional stories and First Nations stories - and the important contribution of diverse Australian stories to our cultural identity.
- The particular importance of Australian stories for Australian children.
- The importance of ensuring Australian content commissions – including drama and documentary – on all platforms/commercial service providers.
- Continuing support for a robust and diverse independent production industry.
- The importance of developing Australian Intellectual Property for domestic and export markets.
- The importance of developing Indigenous Cultural and Intellectual Property (ICIP) for domestic and export markets.
- Ongoing employment of Australians on productions in Australia, particularly in regional Australia

Australian content should be sourced from a dynamic and diverse domestic content production industry that includes both larger and small independent production companies, including regionally-based producers and practitioners.

Screenworks argues that to ensure a robust industry and ongoing employment and business development – especially in regional Australia – the regulatory framework and government incentives should promote a mix of domestic and international productions in Australia. We support changes to regulation and incentives that will stimulate industry growth, jobs, exports and both the quality and quantity of Australian content delivered to Australian audiences.

Screenworks' members are challenged by the small and declining number of commissioning opportunities and platforms in Australia. This combined with rising budgets decreased domestic investment and a need to secure higher levels of international finance in a competitive global market has left many independent producers struggling to generate sustainable incomes.

Screenworks strongly argues for increased financial support from the Australian Government for regionally-based content and also independent producers, SMEs and independent screen practitioners that reside outside of the major cities.

It is critical to the future viability of our constituents - and for a robust Australian industry - that the regulatory framework ensures that all platforms deriving income from Australian audiences and subscribers are required to commission new Australian content.

We also emphasise the importance of supporting a diversity of Australian production businesses developing original Australian Intellectual Property, and the need for additional financial incentives and investment, such as through the CAST fund, specifically allocated to companies and projects based in regional, rural and remote Australia.

Conclusion

In conclusion, Screenworks would like to reiterate that it supports the ongoing role for the Australian Government to provide a regulatory framework that ensures access to Australian stories on screen for Australian audiences, and a viable Australian screen production industry that provides employment and business opportunities, especially in regional Australia.

CONTACT DETAILS

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