

Content Options Paper Submission

I am a writer working in the film and television industry here in Australia, and I have eagerly anticipated having the opportunity to respond to this content options paper in the hope that future policy will both support my ability to work and perform in my career, as well as continually strengthen the industry that I love.

I would love to touch of three areas:

- Commercial broadcasting content obligations
- Streaming service obligations
- Children's content obligations

COMMERCIAL BROADCASTING

I am extremely sympathetic of the position that commercial broadcasters have now found themselves in. Audiences have increasingly turned to streaming services for their drama and comedy options, leaving commercial broadcasters with a dwindling audience, and as a result, less of a reason to spend large amounts of money on continuing to produce Australian scripted narrative content.

Despite this, I have found many of the decisions made by the commercial broadcasters to be lacking in forethought, and a self-fulfilling prophecy. To offset the potential for a smaller audience, they spend less and less money on their productions, resulting in cheaper and cheaper products that do not appeal and/or satisfy the majority of audiences who can easily find a higher quality product via streaming services. As a result, they spend even less money on the next production, and so the cycle continues. I have a hard time thinking about the future of commercial broadcasting content. Considering the commercial networks are currently at the point where they are considering just foregoing their obligations to children's content without any fear of reprisal, how long before they do the same with adult drama?

Despite my sympathy, I do feel it is a result the broadcasters have only brought upon themselves. It has felt to me that they sought to find ways to suspend obligations to their content requirements rather than find ways to adapt – this isn't any more clear than the ongoing concerns around children's content. They are deliberately undermining the potential success of content obligations; in the hope they may disappear altogether.

If commercial networks believe they cannot compete with the 'premium' drama found on streaming services, then they need to start thinking laterally. *Home & Away* and *Neighbours* continue to employ profitable production models, as did the 40-week-a-year model of *Blue Heelers*, *All Saints* and the like, which have all been lost in the last decade. The sunk cost for the currently favoured short-run series do commercial operators no favour. And let's be honest, the abysmal quality of generic (and low rating) series like *Playing For Keeps*, *Bite Club*, *My Life is Murder* and the like indicate that commercial networks haven't been thinking strategically about what may actually garner them an audience and attention. More consideration should be paid to production models employed by the ABC, which are often co-commissioned alongside international broadcasters and streaming services.

As the content options paper details, if content obligations were to disappear, the content would to. And that would be a devastating loss to an industry, and more important, to the culture, which should exist to protect us from the vast amounts of cultural imperialism the country faces on a daily basis. The content obligations must be retained - Australians should watch, engage with, and critically reflect on Australian stories. Otherwise, who are we? And what do we become?

STREAMING SERVICES

It does not make sense to me that there be content obligations imposed on commercial broadcasters and for the same not to be expected of streaming services, which take Australian money overseas to profitable international corporations, and in the case of some services, don't spend any of that money back in Australia itself.

At the same time, I am sympathetic to streaming service concerns that Australia is a small market and can't be expected to invest millions and millions of dollars without restraint. But if the cultural imperative for content obligations remains true, then it should apply to streaming services as well.

I believe an appropriate option would be to tie the content obligations to revenue or the like. As a writer, I feel as though audiences will increasingly turn to these services for their entertainment option, and if there is no impetus from the Australian government to support the industry that they are currently operating in, then, when compared with lessening support from commercial operators, the future looks very bleak for the scripted workforce.

It would be a dream for Australian productions to be able to stand, financially, on our two feet. But with our population being what it is, it is not competitively possible. Until that time, the government much recognise the cultural importance of Australian stories, and support the industry to remain alive, kicking, and contributing to the economy.

CHILDREN'S CONTENT

As someone who has worked in children's content, I have been particularly concerned about the lack of support for children's content that has arisen over the last sixth months. Children's content obligations **must** remain, for all the above reasons, but also because children's content is foundational for a child's respect, love and desire for Australian content into the future. We want Australian children to see themselves on television, and to seek out the positive feelings it gives them long into the future.

I understand that parents are more likely to plant their child in front of ABC content rather than the offerings on commercial networks, so if there was a government policy to transplant commercial obligations to the ABC than I feel that would be a fair and equitable strategy to ensure our world-class and award-winning children's content continues to be produced and enjoyed around the world.

Thank you for considering this submission.