

It is vitally important for the future of feature films in this country that the Australian screen industry redefine its definition of distribution and exhibition to include online platforms such as Netflix and Stan.

Under current arrangements, a feature film cannot be eligible for Screen Australia funding without a local distribution deal for a cinema release. This blanket requirement fails to take into account the rapidly changing nature of the film landscape.

The cinema-going public for Australian film is skewing increasingly older, whiter and richer. This commercial reality functions to narrow the scope for the kinds of films likely to receive distribution deals and thus, in turn, Screen Australia funding. And this narrows the diverse appeal of Australian cinema in general.

If we are only catering to the subscription bases of Palace Cinemas, we must accept we are not catering to the majority our country. And this, unfortunately, is precisely what is happening.

Opening up the distribution space to include Netflix and Stan and Amazon allows us to take advantage of their audience reach and this will ultimately lead to more diverse, audience focussed films being made (both in terms of cultural perspective and genre). But not just made, seen. The data from SBS On Demand or ABC iView suggests easier access to Australian content leads to a more views, better awareness and a greater inclination to watch more. The online platforms are clearly where the audiences are. We need to be there too.

But this is only half of the equation. In order for this to be a viable solution, we need to ensure that Netflix and the like are properly incentivised to invest in Australian content - both through tax offsets and government legislation that includes some form of legislated local content quota (which should not include cheaply produced reality TV).

We as an industry have been talking for over a decade now about the urgent need to engage with the broader Australian audience. We've tried many things and attempted many reforms. But, sadly, not much has changed. And we kid ourselves about the state of our industry when we do things like announce a "record annual box office" that includes films like *Hacksaw Ridge* or *Aquaman*. Honestly, who are we kidding?

Our industry's worth to the Australian culture and economy should not need to rely on spin and creative accounting to make a compelling case.