

22 June 2020

## ASSG Response to “Supporting Australian stories on our screens—options paper”

The Australian Screen Sound Guild (ASSG) represents the profession of sound in film, television, and other screen and media industries. Members include those who work in production (location sound during principal photography) and post-production (sound editing and mixing). Our members are highly skilled and well-regarded, with many of them recipients of numerous Australian and international awards - including six individuals who are winners of Academy Awards for Sound Editing and Sound Mixing. But even the highest of awards do not guarantee future work.

ASSG members are directly impacted by the various forms of support provided by governments for “Australian stories on our screens in a modern, multi-platform environment”. It is these Australian stories that provide the bulk of our employment. Therefore, we welcome this opportunity to provide a response to the ACMA/Screen Australia Options Paper on behalf of our members and all screen sound professionals.

The authors of the Options Paper have laid out evidence that makes a clear case for the continued support of local production. As well, the Paper makes apparent the dangers that would arise from removing support or de-regulating obligations on broadcasters and content providers.

In particular, the example given in Appendix D, where in 2003 the UK removed children’s content obligations from public sector broadcasters resulting in a fall in production investment of 95%, acts as a strong warning that an unregulated free market is likely to be detrimental to local production levels. This alone suggests that the “voluntary” undertaking suggested in Model 2 would likely have a negative effect on Australian screen production activity.

The Paper outlines in detail the changes to audience viewing patterns that have resulted from digital disruption - including a significant decline in FTA audiences. This highlights the need for content obligations to be extended to the new platforms where the audience is now. However, based on the evidence presented on page 21 of the Options Paper that the majority of content on Australian SVOD services is at least five years old, audiences are not being treated with much respect by those services. Clearly, SVOD services need to play a stronger part in delivering new Australian stories to our audiences.

For these reasons the ASSG can only support “**Model 3: Significant**” detailed in the Options Paper. In relation to that model, we would suggest that Option B is the only choice that will allow for continued local production and employment for Australian

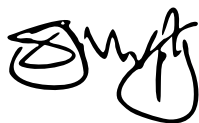
screen professionals, including our members.

In addition to the adoption of Model 3, we believe changes are required to some aspects of the indirect funding of productions via tax offsets. The PDV (post-production) Offset threshold (currently \$500,000) does work for certain kinds of productions, but the benefits flow mostly to larger production houses and visual effects/animation facilities. A substantial lowering or abolition of the threshold would mean that smaller post-production businesses such as sound editing and mixing facilities could attract additional work from around the globe. The skill and experience of our practitioners is not in question, but the sad reality is that the economics of where work is done matters more than who does it, and as a result, skilled Australian sound professionals are missing out.

Many of our location/production sound members work on the large budget international (“footloose”) productions described in the Options Paper. Beyond the employment opportunity these productions provide to Australian personnel, they are also an important avenue for the development of skills and experience well beyond anything that is available on lower budget Australian productions, where both time and resources are limited. This is particularly important for our younger crew and those working in junior/assistant roles. The number of these assistant roles on large international productions is far greater than on local Australian projects, and this equates to greater opportunity for the development of specialist expertise - the kind of expertise that can be both the foundation of their careers and can be transferred to local productions. The ASSG asks that any changes to the Location Offset should ensure it continues to attract these large international productions that are so important for our members, both in terms of direct employment and for longer term training and development.

The Australian Screen Sound Guild is pleased to have the opportunity to make this submission, and looks forward to the adoption of a new model which will genuinely allow for continued employment of our members, and for sustainable production activity that supports local employment, promotes Australian culture globally and allows Australian audiences access to their own stories.

Kind regards,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'S Murphy', with a stylized flourish at the end.

Stephen Murphy  
President, ASSG