

**Submission in response to *Supporting Australian stories on our screens*,
Options paper, March 2020**

30 June 2020

The Australian Society of Authors

The Australian Society of Authors (ASA) is the peak industry body and national membership organisation for Australian writers and illustrators. We have over 3,300 members and over 6,700 subscribers to our newsletter.

The ASA believes that, in the wake of the Covid-19 pandemic, there is an even more urgent need to advocate for a diverse range of Australian stories, voices and culture to be brought to life on screen. We cannot make sense of our experiences or tell our national story, learn from our past or imagine our future without Australian content.

We are not making a submission on the specific consultation questions posed by the Options paper but would like to make very brief comments on the fundamental role played by books in the creation of screen content.

Many television series and films begin their life as a book. By way of example, we list below television series and films that were adapted from Australian books and the year in which they were first screened.

We have limited this list to film and television series released since the year 2000 but could easily provide earlier examples, such as *Schindler's List* based on *Schindler's Ark* by Tom Keneally, a film which won Best Picture at the Academy Awards (1994), along with six other Academy Awards and numerous accolades.

Adaptations

- *Round the Twist* (1990 – 2001) – first two series were based on stories by Paul Jennings
- *Looking for Alibrandi* (2000) – based on the book by Melina Marchetta
- *Chopper* (2000) – based on Mark Brandon Read's autobiographical stories
- *He Died with a Falafel in his Hand* (2001) - based on autobiographical novel by John Birmingham
- *Rabbit-Proof Fence* (2002) - based on the novel by Doris Pilkington (Nugi Garimara)

- *Stiff* and *The Brush Off* from The Murray Whelan series (2004) – based on the detective novels by Shane Maloney
- *48 Shades* (2006) - based on Nick Earls' novel *48 Shades of Brown*
- *Romulus, My Father* (2007) – based on the biographical memoir by Raimond Gaita
- *Nim's Island* (2008) and *Return to Nim's Island* (2013) –based on children's book by Wendy Orr
- *Snowtown* (2011) – based on the books *Killing for Pleasure* by Debi Marshall and *The Snowtown Murders* by Andrew McGarry
- *Red Dog* (2011) – Loosely based on a 2002 novel by Louis de Bernières (English writer)
- *The Hunter* (2011) - based on the novel by Julia Leigh
- *The Slap* (2011) – based on the novel by Christos Tsiolkas
- *Puberty Blues* (2012)- based on the novel by Kathy Lette and Gabrielle Carey
- *Conspiracy 365* – based on the novels by Gabrielle Lord
- *Jack Irish* (2012) - based on the Jack Irish novels by Peter Temple
- *The Broken Shore* (2013)- based on crime novel by Peter Temple
- *The Book Thief* (2014) – based on the novel by Markus Zusak
- *The Dressmaker* (2015) - based on the 2000 novel by Roslaie Ham
- *Tomorrow When the War Began* (2016) - based on novel by John Marsden
- *Lion* (2016) - based on memoir of Saroo Brierley
- *The Family Law* (2016) - based on memoir by Benjamin Law
- *Jasper Jones* (2017) - based on the novel by Craig Silvey
- *Seven Types of Ambiguity* (2017) - based on novel by Elliot Perlman
- *Big Little Lies* (2017) - based on novel by Liane Moriarty (American producer, HBO)
- *Breath* (2017) - based on novel by Tim Winton
- *The Secret River* (2018) - based on novel by Kate Grenville
- *Ladies in Black* (2018) - based on novel by Madeleine St John
- *Lambs of God* (2019) - based on novel by Marele Day (ranked high among Foxtel's most watched programs)
- *Ride Like a Girl* (2019) - based on memoir of Michelle Payne
- *Dirt Music* (2019) - based on novel by Tim Winton

- *True History of the Kelly Gang* (2020) - based on novel by Peter Carey
- *Burial Rites* - based on novel by Hannah Kent
- *The Dry* - based on Jane Harper's novel (starring Eric Bana, due for release August 2020)
- *Shantaram* - based on memoir by Gregory David Roberts
- *The Secrets She Keeps* – based on novel by Michael Robotham (TV series, Network ten)
- *Miss Fisher's Murder Mysteries* (TV series and film, 2020) – based on novels by Kerry Greenwood
- *The Lost Flowers of Alice Hart* – based on novel by Holly Ringland (funded for development by Screen Australia)
- *The Hating Game* - by Sally Thorne (in production, American producer)
- *Boy Swallows Universe* - by Trent Dalton (being adapted for television with Australian actor Joel Edgerton named as the show's producer)
- *Billie B Brown* – by Sally Rippin (being adapted for television, has funding through Film Victoria's Development on Demand Fund).

Films, television and books have a symbiotic relationship. Publishers commonly release a 'tie-in edition' of the book upon the release of the film / television series, re-jacketed with an image from the film/ television series which typically leads to a boost in book sales.

From the perspective of a producer, book adaptations tend to perform well. In research undertaken in collaboration with Screen Australia, Matthew Hancock found: "For titles released in 1999–2008, a comparison of the typical earnings for individual films shows that adaptations perform better in the average than original films. ... the box office earnings for adaptations are more consistent. Their median box office was almost triple that of original films during the study period, at \$1.1 million compared to \$370,000."¹

Matthew Hancock's research also suggests that rates of adaptations should be increased, as they are overseas. "While the development rates for adaptations in Australia are largely unknown, the proportion released in 1999–2008 suggests that it is low when compared to the US and UK. In the US, around 70 per cent of

¹ Matthew Hancock, *Mitigating Risk; the case for more adaptations in the Australian film industry*, research undertaken as part of the Master of Arts program at the Australian Film, Television and Radio School in collaboration with Screen Australia, July 2010, <https://www.screenaustralia.gov.au/getmedia/89914fab-859f-47aa-a82e-950f6ec51474/Mitigating-risk.pdf?ext=.pdf>

all projects being developed by Hollywood studios are adaptations. In the UK it is just shy of 50 per cent.”²

One way of increasing Australian adaptations is mandating minimum Australian screen content. By requiring Subscription Video on Demand businesses (SVODs) to ensure locally made content in Australia is produced and broadcast, the Government would also be supporting authors, whose works are adapted for the screen, and publishers, who negotiate such adaptations and capitalise on renewed market interest in the book.

We are aware of other organisations making submissions that SVODs should contribute 10% of income derived in Australia to make, promote and broadcast Australian made content. We endorse these submissions on the basis that funds for Australian production benefit the whole creative community, including our members.

In his Ministerial Statement regarding this consultation, Minister Fletcher said, “The technology may change, the industry structure may change, but our goal is constant: great Australian stories are seen by viewers in Australia and around the world.”

To support this goal, we submit that the Government also ought to allocate funding to train and assist publishers pitch to producers, as only the large publishers have experienced rights managers who are skilled in these negotiations. Very modest funding via Australia Council for training for small and medium publishers and independently published authors would allow a greater portion of Australia’s high quality literary stories to be captured on screen.

Thank you for the opportunity to make this submission.

Olivia Lanchester
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² *ibid.*