

Formal Submission

Supporting Australian stories on our screens.

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My name is Erin Roche. I am an Australian costume designer. I work in film and television. I am also a Doctor of Creative Industries and a Churchill Fellow. I have practiced, researched and lived costume for my entire life.

I have worked in costume for 20 years, and as a head of department - costume designer for 8 years.

In general it is critical to Australian culture to have a broad array of Australian stories made and heard through visual narratives. Story telling helps create a national identity but also helps us deal with our past and offers hope for how we can dream for our future. These are the broad-brush strokes of story telling.

When you look at a film and pull it a part and really see all the hands that helped make it you will also see the depth of story telling. As a costume designer I consider myself a storyteller, an artist. The body is my canvas and cloth is my medium to express character. The very nature of how I design as an Australian, how all Australians dress, even the specifics of Australian tailoring, are anthropological aspects of our culture that deserve to be preserved, celebrated, told, and developed.

In 2018 I designed the costumes for High Ground, a feature film set in 1919 in Arnhem Land detailing our First Nation warriors and their fight against colonisation. The story details horrific massacres of the time and intergeneration trauma. This is not a story I have seen on Australian screens before and it is our hope that it will help in the conversation of truth telling in our Nation's history. Sadly, not surprising but deeply disappointing is the lack of documentation regarding traditional dress of the time. And even more distressing is knowing that the traditions of indigenous dress from early colonisation and before will be lost with each elder that passes. This isn't just a question or point about making more content for Netflix. This is a fight to save our history. The more indigenous stories that are made for film and television, the more research and history we can document about our First Nation's people. I would hope that with more indigenous story telling, we would end up with indigenous crew who can bring their life stories to their art and create even more authentic content.

I have been progressing through the Australian costume department ranks on my career journey for 20 years. However how I progress from here is really connected to policy and Australian content production. If you think of production budgets in bands – low budget feature, middle and Big Budget and Marvel/ International. The middle level of production has been missing for some time. Which means I have not had an opportunity to progress my skill set and develop as a designer beyond a certain budgetary level. The flow on effect impacts each person in my department and how their skills develop. More Australian content would mean more mid range productions that would have the capacity to act as a stepping stone to eventually working on major large scale productions. And also give confidence to international producers hiring in Australia.

On a local level there is no one network more important to our cultural identity than the ABC. As a public broad caster the ABC is in a position to tell everyone's story without obligation to advertisers. Not all stories are great for sales, but all stories deserve a space to be told, even if their telling makes us uncomfortable or only speaks to a minor demographic. Those small communities deserve to see themselves on screen just as much as the status quo in the community. This rings true especially for children. If I child from a small community, of a different level of ability, a minority culture can see themselves in a positive progressive light on television we know, the research tells us, that we help them build a better future for themselves. A positive self image and a guide to dream big, makes for big futures. The telling of these different stories is in itself a revolutionary act and Australia has the capability to harness these stories and make powerful futures.

Finally on children's TV. My childhood dreams were imagined through the round, square and arch windows of Playschool. I have recently become a mum and I want my child to grow up with an Australian accent, knowing about our culture, being proud that he comes from the country with the oldest continuous living culture in the world, has an Australian sense of humour and knows that as an Australian he is in a brave progressive country. When I was 21 I moved to London and was consistently embarrassed about my "Australianness", that I came from a cultural vacuum and felt lesser to my European friends and jealous of their grand and ancient culture. This version of our national identity has to change. What we look like as a country to ourselves and how we feel on the world stage can be better than how I felt as a 21 year old. I do not want my child carrying this tall poppy, colonised, not as good as attitude forward. The way to break it, to change it is to tell more Australian stories. Make us proud of our arts, our ancient history, and help a nation heal by seeing ourselves better. I do believe in being the change you want to see, but if you can see the change, I believe it's an easier transition to better.

Significant change is the only option.