
Malcolm McKinnon

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I write as a documentary filmmaker dedicated in my work to the telling of distinct Australian stories. I have made films for broadcast on ABC television, for screening at film festivals and other events and for exhibition in museums in all Australian states and territories (see: www.recklesseye.com). I write also in my capacity as part of an audience hungry for good Australian content on our screens and as someone that appreciates the importance of Australian filmmaking as a critical manifestation of our national culture.

It is clearly time to update policy and regulation to encourage and protect a healthy and appropriate quota of Australian content via all popular delivery mechanisms, including streaming sites and VOD services such as Netflix, Stan and others. Free-to-air broadcast is no longer the main platform for presentation of screen content for Australian audiences. The Australian content quota mechanisms that have worked in the past are therefore no longer adequate and must be reworked and extended.

Although global in reach, streaming services are geographically prescribed and regulated. Geo-blocking and other devices work to limit the extent and price of content for viewers in particular regions. (Large corporations may employ profit-shifting accounting measures to minimise tax liabilities, but this doesn't alter the fact of a defined and measurable Australian audience.) Platforms such as Netflix service a distinct Australian market. In doing so, such platforms should meet a regulated requirement for a prescribed quota of Australian content, coupled with incentives for supporting the production of such content. The existing Australian Content requirements for free-to-air television licensees provide an appropriate frame of reference to guide the extension and evolution of such regulation for screening content on newer platforms, including specific requirements for Australian adult drama and Australian children's content.

There are obvious economic and cultural reasons for mandating and regulating a healthy quota of Australian screen content. The Australian screen industry employs thousands of people in creative and technical production roles, as well as providing enormous economic benefits via affiliated and associated industry and location services. Beyond this economic dimension, the creation and exhibition of new Australian content is essential for the ongoing exploration and celebration of Australian culture and society. We need to tell our own stories and we need to see ourselves on our screens. We have a rich and distinct culture, history and society that needs to be reflected in all of the different types of content that we see on our screens. If we fail to support the production and exhibition of Australian screen content then we effectively abandon ourselves to the insidious effects of cultural imperialism and become merely a subsidiary market for bigger and more powerful content producing nations. The history of Australian cinema provides evidence of how that sorry state of affairs has been allowed to occur in some earlier eras. We must learn from that history and ensure these regulatory failures are not repeated within the new screen environment.

Incentives and obligations for supporting the production and exhibition of Australian content must be applied across all platforms. All commercial content providers — including streaming services — must be encouraged and obliged to invest in new Australian content. Further, our public broadcasters in the ABC and SBS must be funded to produce independent and non-commercial Australian programmes, including high-quality content for children.

I wish for my submission to be anonymous: No

I wish for my submission to be private: No

Supporting documents:

This submission has been lodged via the [Media, Entertainment & Arts Alliance](#).