

***Supporting Australian Stories on our Screens: Screen Australia and ACMA,  
Options Paper, 19 March 2020***

**SUBMISSION BY;**

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**COMPANY INTRODUCTION**

Media World Pictures is one of Australia's oldest and experienced independent film and television production companies. Based in Melbourne and operating since 1983, Media World has successfully developed and produced hundreds of hours of award-winning content for both television and the big screen. Our aim is to produce high quality Australian content for Australian and international audiences.

Our credits include the feature film *The Silver Brumby* starring Russell Crowe, the prime-time mini-series, *The Circuit* and Australia's first Indigenous comedy feature film, Richard J. Frankland's *Stone Bros*.

Our animation credits include *The Flamin' Thongs* (co-produced with Red Dog Bites, Australia), *Dogstar*, the adult sitcom *John Callahan's QUADS!* (co-produced with Nelvana, Canada), *The New Adventures of Ocean Girl* and the animated adventures of *The Silver Brumby*. The company has been nominated and won numerous Australian and International Awards for best children's and animation production including, Logie, AFI and AACTA Awards, and Best Animation Awards in Asia, North America and Australia.

Media World specialises in producing quality Animation, made entirely in Australia. We are amongst only a handful of companies in Australia that create, script, voice, animate and post produce for primarily Australian audiences, which are then distributed throughout the world by our international distribution alliance's. Ours is both a domestic and export business and needs both markets to survive. Our first animated show, *The Silver Brumby* produced in 1993-1996 continues to attract viewers around the world whilst our most recent productions have sold to the UK, Canada, Disney Asia, and multiple other territories worldwide.

Our productions employ crews of over 50 people for every production usually over a 2 year period for each show.

More recently the company co-produced Australia's first animated series totally written, voiced and directed by Indigenous Australians, *Little J & Big Cuz* which is now in its 3<sup>rd</sup> season. We are

now also co-producing a second season of the children's animation series, *The Strange Chores* with multiple International Emmy Award winners, Brisbane-based, Ludo Studio.

**Currently Australian FTA broadcasters are required to air 25 hours of first run children's drama content per year - less than 1 hour per week. The FTA's have been relentlessly pushing back on this requirement as they argue that they cannot make a financial return and that the viewers aren't watching, not helped with no marketing support and restrictive advertising.**

### **Streaming Services and what they currently mean for program makers**

The increase in non-traditional outlets has not represented a boom-time for Australian producers. Rather, program licence fees paid by the FTA networks have plummeted, and the alternate outlets offer small or no licence fees at all. YouTube doesn't offer production funding (except in limited circumstances for hugely successful YouTube creators) and one has to attract tens of millions of hits to attract any sort of meaningful income that could contribute to production budgets for quality Australian content. The quality and child friendly appropriateness of this content is questionable.

### **SUBMISSION TO SUPPORTING AUSTRALIAN STORIES**

**We do not support one above the other of any of the 4 options presented in the Options Paper. No single option presented manages to cover adequately a replacement to the current model in place. We do however support several changes presented within the document. High on that list is closing the loophole of New Zealand produced content qualifying as Australian content for the purposes of meeting quota.**

Media World Pictures is an active member of SPA. We have contributed to SPA's submission to the options paper and are in broad agreement with SPA's response.

We also are signatories to a group submission of more than 20 production companies that are primarily involved in producing content for Australian children. Again, we largely support the consensus of opinions being presented by this group with the following observations;

- The proposed establishment of an Australian Children's Content Fund (ACCF) we think would add yet another layer of cost to the industry. Maintaining a level of children's content quota applied to all broadcasters, streamers and other service providers on a platform neutral basis is the simplest approach to offer the greatest viewer choice across the market. Critical to this model is sufficient and dedicated funding to the ABC & SBS to meet this obligation.
- We feel the increase to the producer off-set for Australian shows should be seen and supported without impacting on the current level and stated purpose of the PDV.

For both these submissions we agree with and endorse the content principles of:

- creating Australian content for Australian children made by Australian companies so Australian children can see themselves reflected on the screen in all their diversity and be able to hear content in their own voice.
- This content needs to be available across each and every platform.
- Current levels of production and investment should remain as the minimum.

### **Current support structures**

We believe the current support structures in place – Australian content quotas for broadcasters, tax offsets for qualifying Australian content, and federal and state screen agency support – set the minimum standard for sustaining the local film and television industry and for ensuring Australians can view and make our own stories. It is more important than ever to strengthen our own voice and industry given the tidal wave of content distribution platforms dominated by North American businesses and the flood of accompanying North American-centric content.

We agree wholeheartedly with Senator Mitch Fifield’s comment in his address to ACMA in 2017

*“First and most fundamentally, Australian stories need to be told. People need to hear our stories, our perspectives, our ideas. We have got a lot to share, and our stories and voices do matter. Our children need to understand the inherent uniqueness of our nation, and the character and diversity of our people.”*

(ACMA Content Conference - Sydney Convention Centre, Darling Harbour, Sydney - Tuesday, 16 May 2017)

The market alone will not deliver children’s television or sufficient adult drama and documentary programming. Rather than repeat the clear cases made elsewhere for supporting Australian drama, documentary and children’s television, we refer to the detailed research referenced in the Content Review paper demonstrating the immense cultural value of creating Australian content.

Children’s television will always need support. It is no cheaper to produce than adult television. International broadcaster presales have plummeted and indeed the whole world has become more protectionist. There are far fewer distributors and their distribution guarantees have similarly declined.

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The way forward lies in maintaining a minimum level of Australian content quotas for the commercial broadcasters and additionally applying the same content quotas to the AVOD and SVOD content distributors and to the ABC, with sufficient government funding for the ABC to be able to meet any imposed quota.

We also advocate applying the same FTA Australian content quotas to the new streaming services – after all, such services are simply using Australian internet infrastructure rather than spectrum to access Australian viewers.

We must not reduce FTA quotas. The FTA networks screen only enough local content to meet quotas and only make what they are legislated to make. Their business model motivates them to buy cheaper content from overseas with no imperative to create content by and with Australian voices, perspectives and cultural values.

We acknowledge the option paper is timely and feel strongly it will take extensive consultation to revise the current industry structures to accommodate the impact of any change to new market entrants.

It is unrealistic to expect that settings devised now will suit all future changes and periodic review will be required. It changes very quickly.

We can't make a mistake for as we understand it, we cannot increase FTA quotas once they are reduced due to the free trade agreement with the US.

Thank you for the opportunity to add our voice to the review.

Yours sincerely

Colin South  
Media World Pictures Pty Ltd

3 July 2020

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