

## **“SUPPORTING AUSTRALIAN STORIES ON OUR SCREENS” FORMAL SUBMISSION TO THE GOVERNMENT**

We pay our respects to the traditional custodians of this land from which we are currently writing, the Gadigal and Wangal peoples of the Eora Nation. We pay our respects to the Elders past, present and emerging.

### **ORGANISATION DETAILS**

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**Confirmation whether or not your submission can be made public—  
published—or kept confidential:** Public

### **OVERVIEW**

Film creates culture, more than anything else. To tell stories and further our understanding of our history is essential at this point. We have the opportunity to set the rules for how streaming platforms operate in Australia. To promote social equity, we need to leverage the desire of companies like Netflix and Amazon to access the Australian market for the benefit of all Australians.

The options paper released demonstrates that Australian audiences are increasingly turning to online services such as subscription video on demand (SVOD) as a primary way of accessing narrative content. Television and traditional theatres are no longer dominant viewing models and we do not see this screen culture changing in the future.

In view of this, we believe it is a problem that online services do not have Australian content obligations and are commissioning comparatively few Australian stories. Thus, we advocate for the third model proposed by the paper: “Significant future facing obligations and incentives that take into account individual platform offerings

and audience engagement.”

However, we think an essential part of making these incentives effective is if there is serious investment in creating local content that is innovative and representative of the diversity of multicultural Australia. The government should address diversity not simply in tokenistic terms. Diversity should be featured both in front and behind the camera, on all levels of funding, from development to production and on all screen boards both public and private.

The options paper states clearly that local content can have instrumental impact. Due to the ability of screen stories including TV dramas, “...to foster conversations and change through storylines that include issues such as racism, sexuality, disability and mental health.” However, the 2016 [Screen Australia “Seeing Ourselves” report](#) shows that a number of Australia’s minorities, in particular people of non-European backgrounds such as Asian, African or Middle Eastern, and people with disabilities are underrepresented on Australian screens.

According to the 2016 “Seeing Ourselves” report, 32% of Australians have a first or second-generation background other than Anglo-Celtic, which compares poorly to the actual representation on our screens, where only 18% of main characters in TV dramas over the last five years are from a background other than Anglo-Celtic.

17% of the population are from non-European (BIPOC) backgrounds, compared to 7% of characters represented on TV.

SBS, whose principal purpose is to provide multilingual and multicultural broadcasting and representation, features approximately 7% of first-release Australian content, across all SBS television channels.

The SBS board, features a completely white leadership, as does the ACMA board – this lack of diversity is not uncommon in the Australian media landscape.

The lack of real non-European cultural diversity may be a significant reason why Australian audiences are being driven to online platforms where they feel represented. International titles that feature over 50% of BIPOC cast members are increasing year on year.

Australians of non-European backgrounds are taxpayers and a substantial proportion of the population, but their representation in the current screen industry is scant; thus, it is inevitable audiences will turn to streaming platforms.

Along with incentives, we believe funding for these programs can be achieved through taxing streaming platforms who generate significant profits from Australian audiences.

## RELEVANT CONSULTATION QUESTIONS

### *1. WHAT OUTCOMES FOR AUDIENCES AND INDUSTRY WILL THE CURRENT SYSTEM SUPPORT, AND FOR HOW LONG?*

The model today is becoming obsolete, not only because of online competitive platforms but because of the lack of diversity and representation on our screens.

Overseas, there is a wide variety of media where minorities make up almost all of the production's screen leads and the stories reflect this specificity and commitment, for example: *Ramy, Atlanta, Insecure, Kim's Convenience, House of Flowers, Fresh Off The Boat, Queen Sugar, Crazy Rich Asians, Moonlight*, among many. Comparatively in Australia, even "diverse" shows usually feature leading Anglo-Saxon characters and/or predominantly Anglo-Saxon creatives.

To address this, we need representation on our screens, and in all funding streams, bodies and boards, present and future, which fully represents the diversity of Australia.

This can be addressed through taxes and programming quotas on Netflix, Amazon and others etc. to significantly increase the number and quality of Australian productions.

### *11. SHOULD SCRIPTED AUSTRALIAN CONTENT BE LIMITED TO AUSTRALIAN DRAMA, DOCUMENTARY AND CHILDREN'S CONTENT, AND ARE REVISIONS TO THOSE TERMS NECESSARY? SHOULD IT BE LIMITED TO 'NEW' CONTENT, HOWEVER DEFINED?*

The category of scripted Australian content should be expanded to suit our changing media landscape and the true diversity of storytelling forms.

There is endless genre potential (multimedia, dark drama-comedies, mixed genres, a broad range of animation beyond the children's category).

There needs to be a sustained investment in innovation, multi-platform media and looking to new digital horizons like Virtual Reality and Augmented Reality.

*12. HOW SHOULD REVENUE BE CALCULATED AND WHAT WOULD BE AN APPROPRIATE INVESTMENT PERCENTAGE RATE? SHOULD THAT PERCENTAGE BE CONSISTENT ACROSS SERVICE PROVIDERS OR VARIED ACCORDING TO BUSINESS MODELS?*

We believe that the contributions of streaming services (including Facebook, Netflix, YouTube, Instagram, Amazon Prime, Tiktok etc) should be significant, they should pay at least a 10% tax – as of now, Netflix earns almost \$1 billion from Australian subscribers yearly but pays minimal tax. This would be outside of production incentives and program quotas.

2% of this 10% tax should be allocated to First Nations filmmakers, producers and screen content creators.

On top of the taxes, they should also have screen quotas which should reflect Australian diversity.

The 10% tax should go directly to fund Australian content and develop a robust industry that represents the demographic diversity of the Australian population – it has to be at least proportionally distributed amongst the different groups, but until equity has been achieved perhaps there needs to be resources specifically allocated to decolonise the Australian media and broadcast landscape.

*13. IN RELATION TO IMPLEMENTATION OPTION B FOR COMMERCIAL CONTENT SERVICE PROVIDERS, HOW OFTEN SHOULD THESE INVESTMENT PLANS BE NEGOTIATED? IN RELATION TO OPTION B FOR COMMERCIAL CONTENT SERVICE PROVIDERS, WHAT AUTHORITY SHOULD THE ACMA HAVE TO NEGOTIATE INVESTMENT PLANS AND IMPOSE MINIMUM REQUIREMENTS?*

ACMA should oversee the implementation of the resources generated by the 10% tax requirement on all streaming services.

This would ensure that imposed quotas can be robust and properly supported.

We believe it is essential and fair that the ACMA board, along with all Australian screen boards, should reflect the diversity of the country if they are to claim to represent Australia.

*14. WHAT PROMOTION AND DISCOVERABILITY REQUIREMENTS WOULD BE EFFECTIVE IN THE MINIMAL AND SIGNIFICANT MODEL?*

We believe a significant amount of resources should be allocated to the promotion of all Australian screen content, an area which is lacking. There should be a significant and specific fund allocated to promoting individual Australian productions. This fund should ensure the increase of marketing budgets, to expand visibility of Australia screen content when competing against well resourced international content.

Even with quotas in place, Australian content can be easily buried on streaming services. Thus, additionally, we believe streaming services should have an imposed requirement to prominently feature Australian stories to users within Australia.

*15. WHAT WOULD BE AN APPROPRIATE LEVEL OF FUNDING FOR NATIONAL BROADCASTERS TO ALLOCATE TO CHILDREN'S CONTENT?*

There should be increased funding for the ABC, SBS and Screen Australia to support a greater quota of Australian children's content that reflects the diversity of Australia. Commercial network quotas should be maintained.

Quality children's content has the capacity to break through international barriers and borders. Meaning Australian created children's content can find significant audiences overseas and not be limited to Australian streaming services or broadcasters.

Additionally, there should be an increased amount of funding from streaming services dedicated specifically to Australian children's content (as children are increasingly turning to online sources over broadcast). Funding should match this change.

*16. WHAT LEVEL OF OFFSET REBATE SHOULD BE PROVIDED ACROSS ALL PLATFORMS?*

The producers offset should be increased immediately from 20 to 40% for ALL productions, not just cinema. Cinema is quickly becoming outdated being supplanted by SVOD. Through the COVID-19 shutdown cinema was completely obsolete, while streaming platforms became the go to for accessing content.

*17. WHY WOULD SOME AUSTRALIAN CONTENT REQUIRE ADDITIONAL SUPPORT, AND SHOULD THIS BE PROVIDED VIA DIRECT OR INDIRECT FUNDING? WHAT OTHER SETTINGS AROUND MINIMUM SPEND, QUALIFYING SPEND AND PATHWAY TO AUDIENCE, WOULD APPROPRIATELY TARGET SUPPORT?*

Additional support in the form of direct funding should be allocated to ensure that screen content must reflect the diversity of Australia. Strict requirements about who gets to tell a story should be put in place. Content made about a specific cultural group, should be made by creatives and workers of that background in prominent roles, e.g. the director/s, writers, producers, crew, etc. They should be represented from development to production phases, and control how and what is being told.

A commitment to supporting diverse creative teams should be taken further than hiring a cultural consultant. This will lead to a more equitable representation in the Australian media landscape.

All these changes will lead to a stronger screen industry, capable of captivating both local and international audiences.

Signed,

UNITED NOTIONS FILM

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