



SUBMISSION TO THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES COMMITTEE ON COMMUNICATIONS AND THE ARTS

INQUIRY:

Broadcasting, online content and live production to rural and regional Australia

FEBRUARY 2016

1. INTRODUCTION TO AUSTRALIAN COUNCIL ON CHILDREN AND THE MEDIA

The **ACCM** is the peak not-for-profit national community organisation supporting families, industry and decision makers in building and maintaining a media environment that fosters the health, safety and wellbeing of Australian children.

ACCM has a national Board representing the states and territories of Australia. With membership consisting of individuals and organisations including Early Childhood Australia, the Australian Council of State Schools Organisations, the Australian Primary Principals Association, the Australian Education Union, the Parenting Research Centre, the NSW Parents Council, the South Australian Primary Principals Association, and the Council of Mothers' Unions in Australia.

ACCM's core activities include the collection and review of research and information about the impact of media on children's development, and advocacy for the needs and interests of children in relation to the media.

This submission has been prepared on behalf of the Board of the ACCM Amelia Joyce (Vice-President) and Ms Barbara Biggins OAM (Hon CEO).

2. COMMENT ON TERMS OF REFERENCE

ACCM will refer to the following of the terms of reference:

the importance of public and commercial broadcasting, online content and live production to rural and regional Australia, including the arts, news and other services.

This Inquiry will likely explore the nature of society, individual and community identity and culture. No doubt, there will also be consideration about the financial costs of acknowledging, representing and celebrating Australian identities, cultures and society.

ACCM would like to highlight that there will also be social and economic costs to not prioritising the creation of locally produced, distinctively Australian content and distributing across public and commercial broadcasting, online content and live production to rural and regional Australia.

Benefits and costs

Australians benefit as individuals, communities and as a nation when they are able to access locally produced, distinctively Australian screen content.

The benefits include individuals and communities developing a strong sense of identity, possessing feelings of belonging and connectedness with others, having opportunity to reflect about their own culture and practices and heightened awareness of and reduced resistance towards the diversity that exists throughout the nation.

When we are viewing Australian screen content we are viewing and offered opportunity to reflect about our culture. Our culture assists learning about and behaving in the world around us. Culture includes, but goes beyond race and ethnicity; it encompasses our ways of knowing and being that are perhaps similar to others, but specific to our own families and communities. By having a deep understanding of our own culture and ability to reflect on how this influences us, we are better equipped to understand, celebrate and benefit from the diversity within Australian society.

There are clear links between the benefits outlined above and individuals maintaining positive mental health. Mental health is an area where there have been significant policy and funding commitments from the Australian governments to improve mental health, due to the significant costs of mental ill-health.

In 2013, [The Case for Mental Health Reform in Australia Report](#) (Medibank) stated that Australia spends at least \$28.6 billion per year, excluding capital expenditure for supporting people with mental illness and indirect costs, such as lost productivity.

Supporting locally produced distinctively Australian content and distributing across public and commercial broadcasting, online content and live production to rural and regional Australia indirectly supports wellbeing and reduces mental health intervention costs.

Usefulness and relevance of locally produced, distinctively Australian content

The 2013 [ACMA investigation](#) found that:

- Local content is important and valued by regional Australians.
 - Regional Australians were largely satisfied with the current levels of local content available.
 - Regional Australians access local content across a wide variety of sources.
 - Television is the source most used for regional news, and is the preferred source for local news, although the audience for this is declining.
 - There are commercial incentives for some regional broadcasters to provide local content.
 - Providing local content on commercial television is a high cost activity and is not necessarily profitable in all markets.
 - Funding pressures affecting regional broadcasters are likely to continue.
- These findings suggest that it is important that maintaining accessible Australian content should remain a priority. However, how the types of content valued and ways of accessing it may be changing and need consideration.

Imagine a 'rural' or 'regional' Australian ... Who do you see?

The answers to this question are of concern for ACCM.

Did you see a child? ...some might not.

While ACCM advocate for continuing to provide locally produced, distinctively Australian content they do not endorse this happening without prioritising children's voice, presence, contributions and rights.

Like all people, children benefit, in the ways previously outlined, from seeing themselves and their contexts in quality media content. This also assists in ensuring children are heard, represented and protected. It is their right ... and everyone's responsibility.

The [United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child \(CROC\)](#) is a universally agreed set of non-negotiable standards and obligations to which Australia is a signatory. The CROC sets out the basic rights of children and the obligations of governments to fulfil those rights. Connections to the following CROC articles highlight reasons why Australian governments are accountable for ensuring children's access to quality, locally produced, distinctively Australian content needs to remain or preferably increase.

- Article 3:
All organisations concerned with children should work towards what is best for each child.
- Article 6:
Children have the right to live a full life. Governments should ensure that children survive and develop healthily.
- Article 12:
Children have the right to say what they think should happen when adults are making decisions that affect them and to have their opinions taken into account.
- Article 17:
Children have the right to reliable information from the media. Mass media such as television, radio and newspapers should provide information that children can understand and should not promote materials that could harm children.
- Article 27:
A standard of living that is good enough to meet their physical and mental needs.
- Article 28
Children have the right to an education.
- Article 29:
Education should develop each child's personality and talents to the full and encourage children to respect their parents, their cultures and other cultures.
- Article 31:
Children have the right to relax, play and to join in a wide range of leisure activities.
- Article 36:
Children should be protected from any activities that could harm their development.

Source: <http://www.unicef.org.au/Upload/UNICEF/Media/Our%20work/childfriendlycroc.pdf>

To assist upholding Children's rights in terms of broadcasting, online content and live production, measures need to be in place to ensure:

- Children's TV is a core obligation of public broadcasters. In particular, distinctly Australian children's live action drama in preference to animation or drama where locality is generic.
- the commercial broadcasters' requirements to make provision for children via the Children's Television Standards and the Australian Content Standard also provide for distinctly Australian children's live action drama and distinguish between animation or drama where locality is generic.
- The creators of online content and Pay TV channels also contribute in ways that ensure Australian children are heard, represented and protected when accessing media.
- Children's content is not used to market to children, and is of a quality that supports growth and development and provides age-appropriate entertainment.

Children's rights need to be at the forefront of creation, production and programming of media. Any future policy development, funding commitments or strategic planning for broadcasting, online content and live production needs to support this.

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