



**SUBMISSION TO THE HOUSE STANDING COMMITTEE
on COMMUNICATIONS and the ARTS, APRIL 2017**

INQUIRY into Factors contributing to the growth and sustainability of the Australian film and television industry.

Introduction

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, and a membership 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.

ACCM bases much of its work on the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child 1990, which is the most authoritative document about how children and families fit into society. Para 3(1) provides that in all actions concerning children, whether undertaken by public or private social welfare institutions, courts of law, administrative authorities or legislative bodies, the best interests of the child shall be a primary consideration. Further article 17 requires that

States Parties recognize the important function performed by the mass media and shall ensure that the child has access to information and material from a diversity of national and international sources, especially those aimed at the promotion of his or her social, spiritual and moral well-being and physical and mental health.

To this end, States Parties shall:

(a) Encourage the mass media to disseminate information and material of social and cultural benefit to the child and in accordance with the spirit of article 29;

(b) Encourage international co-operation in the production, exchange and dissemination of such information and material from a diversity of cultural, national and international sources;

(c) Encourage the production and dissemination of children's books;

(d) Encourage the mass media to have particular regard to the linguistic needs of the child who belongs to a minority group or who is indigenous;

(e) Encourage the development of appropriate guidelines for the protection of the child from information and material injurious to his or her well-being, bearing in mind the provisions of articles 13 and 18.

Promoting healthy choices and stronger voices in children's media

Australian Council on Children and the Media (incorporating Young Media Australia)

Patrons: Steve Biddulph Baroness Susan Greenfield

Pres: Elizabeth Handsley; Vice-Pres. Amelia Joycet; Hon CEO: Barbara Biggins, OAM

Comment on factors contributing to the growth and sustainability of the Australian film and television industry.

It is obvious that the Children's and Preschool television quotas under the Children's Television Standards (CTS) have played a significant role in the growth and sustainability of the Australian television production industry for many years. The Australian Council on Children and the Media (ACCM) celebrates the CTS, and their provision of a minimum amount of quality, age appropriate, entertaining, life-enhancing and culturally-relevant content for Australian children.

Dedicated children's content quotas are beneficial for children, and could be even more beneficial if broadcasters would promote, market and schedule that content in such a way as to maximise its audience. Their failure to do so in Australia is well documented.

The CTS have been beneficial to the industry itself with the CTS, including the Australian Children's drama quotas, having been the incentive for the production of a number of programs which won international awards and sales. The further development of talent and programs within the industry has only been limited by broadcasters' unwillingness or inability to embrace the potential for both child audiences and the industry.

The significance of platform proliferation and audience fragmentation for children's content policy is frequently exaggerated. Contrary to received wisdom, children (especially younger ones) still watch a lot of free-to-air television (Coredata 2017, oztam 2016, Yu and Baxter 2015) and that industry still enjoys considerable protection. It should be remembered that Australian broadcasting licensees are not just competing against online and on-demand content delivery, they are part of that market in addition to having retained their privileged position in traditional media. Indeed the level of protection has been substantially increased in recent years, as the existing oligopoly was extended to digital multi-channels. ACCM is sceptical of any suggestion that the industry's fortunes are flagging in such a way as to justify any change to regulatory policy. Indeed, the industry itself states that 'broadcast TV viewing dominates over online' (Free TV Australia, 2017) and refers to 'the unique and special place that [free to air television] continues to hold in the lives of all Australians'. (FreeTV Australia, 2016)

In this era of digital disruption there is an enormous amount of content on offer to children, a lot of which is superficially appealing but low quality and/or inappropriate. Among other things, much of it is driven by the desire to market products to children, and the story content (so important for children's entertainment and development) is poor. Far from justifying deregulation, this makes it more important than ever to ensure that high-quality, age-appropriate, culturally relevant and entertaining content is made easily available to Australian children. The market is unlikely to support the production of that content of its own accord, rather government regulation and incentives are needed. We note that the United Kingdom has recently increased children's content quotas on the BBC. (Hughes, Laura 2017)

We note further that any reduction in Australian content quotas now could never be reversed because of the free trade agreement with the US. If only for this reason, the Commonwealth should tread very carefully before giving serious consideration to winding back the protections that have served the Australian community well for so many years.

ACCM is indebted to the Screen Producers Association for the careful research and analysis that have informed the discussion at pp 14-17 of its submission. We endorse SPA's recommendations:

- to require more effective marketing and promotion of quality children's content; and
- to extend current regulations to new market entrants.

References

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