

Submission to the Australian and Children's Screen Content Review 2017

Thank you for the opportunity to provide comments to this Review. The following are some of my comments which go towards addressing some of the questions posed in the Consultation Paper. I have provided reasons and examples for my comments but As I have no expertise in the film and television sector or in this policy space, I will leave the data to that referred to in the Consultation Paper and note the continued advocacy and research work by the Australian Children's Television Foundation.

I write this submission as someone who has benefited from Australian children's television and who wants this benefit to continue for children who are too young at present to have a say in this Review which impacts on them. These view are my own.

I agree with the three policy objectives articulated in the discussion paper. It is important to secure quality Australian content and I agree that children's content is important enough to be a core objective. Finally with the rapid changing of the screen sector including the emergence of new technologies it is important to review how the government can ensure the sustainability and growth of our creative sector.

The screen industry delivers important social and cultural benefits that cannot be easily measured, as well as economic dividends. While I understand that government is limited by budgetary constraints and that government is not the only way to achieve these policy outcomes, my wish is for more funding to the arts including towards Australian children's content and a strong domestic production sector.

While it may not be a basic need or a core issue to child wellbeing as the prevention of abuse and neglect, the benefit to children of content specifically for them is important enough to be recognised as a human right. Article 17 of the Convention on the Rights of the Child states that state parties 'shall ensure that the child has access to information and material from a diversity of national and international sources, especially aimed at the promotion of his or her social, spiritual, moral well-being and physical and mental health'.

Australian children's content in particular live action children's content is a content type that the market is likely to fail to deliver in the absences of government support. Throughout this Review process we have already heard that the market, from the comments of the CEOs to the major commercial networks, do not want to deliver children's content because it is costing them money and/or doesn't generate money.

Australian children's content is important because it is specifically for our children. It helps Australian children (and children around the world through distribution of this content) explore and define their identity. It reflects their world to them, the Australian landscape, language and social values, which helps them navigate growing up in the world. Live action children's drama explore varied and complex issues including friendship and bullying, love and loss, and can

enhance a child's understanding of not only what it means to be Australian but what it means to be human.

Australia has produced such great content that the 90s kid me grew up watching *Around the Twist*, *Genie Genie* from *Down Under* as a child, then *Lockie Leonard* as a teen and even as a person in my mid-20s I recently discovered *Dance Academy* and binge watched it on ABCiView. Live action has a sense of place that animation which dominates much of children's content today does not. I grew up in a migrant household that didn't have a lifestyle that involved camping or driving across Australia in a caravan as many of my Australian friends did. But Australia from city to country town to the outback was reflected to me through these shows.

As an Australian-Chinese person, I love how live action children's content also reflects Australia's cultural diversity. In that respect it is far ahead of our Australian adult television.

It should be a government priority to implement policy settings to ensure our creative sector and talent to thrive so that our talent can continue to do well internationally and to attract international productions to Australia. The link between my career aspirations and the steps to get there were clear and accessible - Uni, relevant work experience and then a job. When I think of the actors I see on screen that are similar in age to me, doing well in Hollywood, I can see the importance of the local industry experience that got them there. While *Home and Away* and *Neighbours* are cultural institutions, they are not the only shows that should be there to develop the talent of Australia's next generation of actors. For all those other jobs that aren't the acting talent, there needs to be support so that the local industry is sustainable, to attract international productions but also to produce our own content and to support these careers that contribute to society in immeasurable and measurable ways. If I could give one example of a success story, Bronson Twist from *Around the Twist* grew up to become the Director of the *Dance Academy* movie.

Live action drama is costly to produce and children's live action especially. This is one of the reasons for a decline in drama programs and an increase in reality television on our commercial networks. Here is where the social good meets the market forces and the need to balance business interests.

The CEO of one of the major networks said that he and his daughter bond by watching *The Bachelor* together. While that is great I wonder if the family bonding experience would be enhanced if there were more quality screen content. If you add another ten years, we might remember fondly the time spent together watching but we probably wouldn't remember the names of the contestants. In contrast, in the *Memory Project*, respondents name Linda Twist and Bronson Twist as their favourite characters. There is the lasting impact of Australian children's television. Memories confirm that importance of local storytelling. Ironically, fictional characters can be more relatable than real people.

Because of this importance think the the government should continue to use quotas, minimum expenditure requirements, tax incentives and funding. However I recognise that the market is changing and so, I would like new policy ideas to focus on how to support the promotion and distribution of Australian screen content including using opportunities in the SVOD space such as co-productions with SVOD services.

Australia has a small audience size but our quality content do well internationally. Children's programs such as Dance Acadmey have been broadcast around the world to more than 100 countries and continues to reach new audiences via Netflix. A look at the YouTube comments to the recent Dance Academy movie trailer shows the issue of distribution. While comments showed enthusiasm from around the world, many bemoaned the inaccessibility of the movie and resorted to illegally downloading the movie.

The ABC series Glitch in an example of what can be possible in this changing environment. It is a quality Australian drama which reached international audiences via Netflix before getting a second series co-produced with Netflix. There is so much good Australian content that deserves to be seen by a wider audience and is missed because of limited resources for promotion and distribution. New policy settings could look into what can be shifted in this space to result in better outcomes for the sector and following on from that benefits to all Australians.