

National Cultural Policy: Australian Screen Culture and Cultural Sovereignty

By

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David Holroyd: Writer/Director

As a Writer/Director with with 50+ hrs of directing credits on scripted TV series, 2 produced feature films as Writer/Director, 50+ hrs of factual credits as Director and Series Producer and a Screen Producers Australia 'Ones To Watch' I am able to give a braad perspective on Australian culture in mainstream media. And this is my feedback to the National Cultural Policy review:

Are we Australian, or are we becoming a convenient secondary market for American culture?

Judging by the volume of American content on our screens, social media feeds, streaming platforms and games, you could be forgiven for thinking we were American. Much of the information, entertainment and cultural influence Australians consume now comes through American-owned and American-led audiovisual platforms.

Australia is in danger of being overwhelmed by American cultural output.

This matters. Recent global events have shown the risks of relying too heavily on American cultural influence: Trumpism, the rise of the far right, misogyny and increasingly polarised public discourse. These values are not inherently Australian, yet they are imported daily through the platforms and content that dominate our cultural lives.

The enthusiastic public relations around the Gold Coast studios, and now Perth Studios, can sound impressive. But the reality is that very little Australian film and television is being made in these spaces. Too often, we are functioning as a service industry for American studios seeking to reduce production costs. State and federal incentives are being used to attract American productions, while Australian stories, Australian companies and Australian cultural content remain under-supported.

This does not meaningfully serve Australian culture.

Of course, Australians have grown up with American film and television, and much of it is loved. But Australia also has its own unique screen culture that is little known outside the country, but is essential to a shared Australian cultural identity: The Castle, Kenny, Kath & Kim. These are known to everyone and help shape a sense of who we are. Others have broken out internationally as well as domestically : Bluey, Talk To Me, Crocodile Dundee, Priscilla, Queen of the Desert.

Recent successes such as Bluey and Talk to Me show that Australian content can succeed both domestically and internationally. So why is this not happening more often?

One major impediment is the requirement for an Australian pathway to audience in order to access the Producer Offset. In practice, the streamers and a small number of television networks are not just gatekeepers; they are often gate blockers. Their commercial incentives do not necessarily align with

the creation of Australian cultural content. American content is often easier to package, sell internationally and use to attract domestic audiences.

If the Producer Offset were available to Australian film and television projects with confirmed international distribution deals, more Australian content would be made, and more Australian stories would reach audiences around the world. Australian broadcasters and platforms could then acquire these projects at a lower cost than if they had funded them upfront. This would increase Australian cultural content both locally and internationally.

There is no shortage of talent or ideas in this country. For every Bluey that gets made, there are many strong Australian projects that never reach production because the pathway is too narrow.

Australia should also consider stronger local content obligations. France requires cinemas to support French film, contributing to a strong national screen culture and a rich film landscape. Why can't Australia, (already seen as a world leader of important social policy such as gun law, anti-aping laws, social media bans) not adopt a more ambitious model to ensure Australian stories remain visible on Australian screens? This would protect our national identity as much as the aforementioned laws.

If government does not act, Australia risks becoming little more than an ancillary market for American content and a low-cost production base for American companies. That would be a failure of cultural policy.

Recent events have shown that middle-power countries cannot rely indefinitely on the United States to protect their interests. As Canadian Prime Minister Mark Carney has argued, countries like Canada and Australia need to work together and look after themselves. The same applies culturally. We need to invest in our own stories, our own voices and our own screen industries.

Listening to American trade podcasts and reading the American screen press makes this clear: Australia is often seen as a place to sell content to, or a place to make content cheaply, not as a cultural partner with its own identity and creative priorities.

A national cultural policy should address this directly. It should support Australian-owned stories, Australian producers, Australian creative workers and Australian pathways to audience. Without this, we risk losing not only an industry, but part of our national identity.

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