

Submission to New National Cultural Policy - Talk to Us

Talk to Us is a post-code diverse youth media collective focused on building sustainable careers in scripted film and television and advocating for the interests of the new generation of creators.

Despite myriad studies and statistics citing a terminal decline in engagement with traditional forms of media dominated by federal, state and legacy media institutions¹, especially among Gen Z and Millennials², these institutions have largely failed to craft narratives purpose-built for new media platforms in consultation with the audiences native to them. This unwillingness to meet younger audiences where they are in terms of formats, themes and platforms of choice risks the sustainability of all broadcasters, as well as any sense of unified Australian screen culture, leaving a vacuum vulnerable to the influence of intentionally addictive and inflammatory global platforms.

This disconnect with younger audiences may be related to limited youth representation in decision-making roles at mainstream broadcasters. It is difficult to find meaningful representation beyond advisory roles that, to the outside observer, appear weakened by layers of bureaucracy or tokenistic; e.g. the ABC's Youth Advisory Committee exists to provide a "...youth perspective on matters being considered by the Advisory Council,"³ whereas we would argue greater youth representation on the Advisory Council itself would serve an equal if not more meaningful purpose. This and similar strategies to ensure youth voices are empowered with editorial and decision-making authority across legacy broadcasters could curb their decline.

There is a clear cut preference for short form, digital platforms by younger consumers, even in terms of the ABC's own content⁴, but this has not been adequately embraced by broadcasters in a way that can properly offset the losses experienced by the softening of the reach of broadcast TV (as demonstrated by the ABC's overall decline in viewership from 2024 to 2025 despite a 10% increase in digital engagement⁵). Internationally and with Australian audiences, independent and often single-creator content that found its popularity among predominantly young audiences on platforms like YouTube is proving to be not only

¹ Lotz, A.D. et al. (2024) Australian Television Drama's Uncertain Future: How Cultural Policy is Failing Australians, QUT ePrints. Available at: <https://eprints.qut.edu.au/248187/>

² Shapiro, E. (2025) Reclaiming 'broadcast', Media War & Peace. Available at: <https://eshap.substack.com/p/reclaiming-broadcast?r=c2f9i>.

³ Australian Broadcasting Corporation Annual Report 2023-24: Advisory Council | Transparency portal. Available at:

<https://www.transparency.gov.au/publications/communications-and-the-arts/australian-broadcasting-corporation/australian-broadcasting-corporation-annual-report-2023-24/accountability/abc-advisory-council>.

⁴ Australian Broadcasting Corporation Annual Report 2024-25: Audience Performance | Transparency portal. Available at:

<https://www.transparency.gov.au/publications/infrastructure-transport-regional-development-communications-sport-and-the-arts/australian-broadcasting-corporation/australian-broadcasting-corporation-annual-report-2024-25/audience-data-%26-analysis-/audience-performance-#4-cj6ym3>.

⁵ Ibid.

on a par with anything on broadcast media in terms of viewership but compelling enough to jump between formats and remain popular, often under the guidance of the original creators. For example, there is a recent and significant trend of popular YouTube creators finding success in cinemas with low-budget genre projects⁶. Scott Cawthon's *Five Nights at Freddy's* series and its subsequent films and novels, as well as *The Backrooms*, an independent YouTube series produced by Kane Parsons that is being developed, with Parsons, into a highly anticipated feature film by A24, are particularly striking examples of the cultural strength of the small-scale content being accessed and/or produced by youth on new media platforms. We argue that legacy media institutions must learn from the themes and modes of distribution this sort of online content represents, and value this sort of independently-produced, creator-led content higher in terms of qualifications for screen media roles.

These trends also indicate a broad preference for genre screen media among youth, a point emphasised by the viral popularity of Australian films such as *Talk to Me* and the upcoming *Leviticus* (the former of which was notably directed by the Phillipou brothers, who cut their teeth on YouTube as RackaRacka). It is important to observe that several of Australia's most culturally persistent properties, such as *Kath & Kim* and *Mad Max*, take place in either a heightened version of Australian lived experience or pass that experience through high-concept genre.

To reconnect with younger audiences and prevent legacy media decline, we suggest that cultural policy:

- Prioritises youth representation in decision-making roles across the board in legacy media institutions,
- Invests in creator-led Australian genre scripted content, distributed and formatted to match the preferences of younger audiences,
- Places more value in the reach and influence of digital platforms such as YouTube,
- and actively scouts these platforms for popular Australian storytellers to canvass new talent and inform what generates engagement in the new media space.

Kind regards,

Members of Talk to Us

⁶ Geraets, N. (2026) 'The algorithm of fear: How YouTubers became the new masters of horror', Sydney Morning Herald, 13 May.