

Submission to the National Cultural Policy Consultation: The Discoverability of Australian Children's Content on Streaming Platform Interfaces

Executive Summary

The Federal Government's *Revive* policy prioritises ensuring Australians can access and discover home-grown stories, alongside a targeted commitment to empower "Australian children and young people to become critical, responsive and active citizens online" (Australian Government, 2023, pp. 85, 105). As the Government looks to the next chapter and seeks input to guide Australia's first consecutive National Cultural Policy, we respond in this submission directly to the 2026 Public Consultation Paper's call for "views on how cultural policy can respond to changing audience behaviours, discovery pathways and modes of engagement, including innovation in presentation and discovery" (Australian Government, 2026, p. 7).

The submission presents new empirical evidence demonstrating how Australian children's television is placed on the major subscription video on demand (SVOD) and broadcaster video on demand (BVOD) platforms. The research was conducted as part of the Australian Research Council Project "Enhancing Discoverability of Australian Children's Television in the Streaming Era" (IE240100031). We evidence how the existence of Australian children's content in a streaming catalogue does not equate to its discoverability (McKelvey and Hunt, 2019). Grounded in longitudinal, cross-device interface audits of the platforms, our research exposes that new Australian children's shows can be difficult to find, despite the "illusion of abundance" (Johnson, 2019, p. 113) within streaming environments. We found that high volumes of local content in a catalogue do not always translate to meaningful visibility, revealing how current streaming architectures may obstruct the discovery pathways of young audiences.

Methodology

To capture how platform affordances shape audiences' "routes to content" (Johnson, Hills and Dempsey, 2023), over an eight-week period our team of three researchers audited streaming homepages across multiple devices: on the native interface of a smart TV, on a smart TV via mobile casting, and on a desktop browser. This cross-device strategy accounts for the different ways audiences access content and allowed us to identify how algorithmic curation and content categorisation operate differently and consistently across devices. We created new accounts to minimise personalised algorithmic recommendations and traced the discoverability of particular programs over time. This process allowed us to compare and contrast static interface structures versus personalised recommendations and dynamic content prioritisation according to time of day. For instance, across the course of our research we found that ABC iView dynamically recategorises and reprioritises children's content based on the time of day: a prominent row in the morning (before 8am) for instance featuring animated children's

content was labelled “For the Early Risers”. For the latter three weeks, we thus timed our interface captures to synchronise during the after-school period (4pm), when children’s content was likely to be visible.

Crucially our method modified previous definitions of an interface’s “prime real estate” – a grid of the first 10 titles within the first 10 recommendation rows (Scarlata and Lobato, 2023) – to reflect our past audience research finding that children tend to browse independently on streaming platforms for just over a minute to choose content (Balanategui, Baker and Clift, 2024). To mirror this brief browsing period, we scrolled horizontally to the end of rows when mapping the overall interface structure and when tracing the “discoverability arc” of a particular program: its shifting placement and visibility across the interface (lordache, García Leiva and Raats, 2025). Beyond that, we conducted one right click. We found that rows could vary significantly in length – from 8 to upwards of 30 titles: as an example, during one audit Stan’s “Trending Kids” row took 14 clicks to get to the end of the row.

This approach aligns with recent methodological scholarship emphasising that streaming platforms differ drastically in the “horizontal length of rows” (lordache, García Leiva and Raats, 2025). Our approach was therefore attentive to the physical friction of horizontal scrolling on Smart TVs, where rows extend beyond the screen’s width. Indeed, the Netflix algorithm weights and positions most strongly recommended titles on the far left of each row (lordache, García Leiva and Raats, 2025, pp. 121-122): titles pushed to the right have less visibility, particularly when horizontal scrolling is required. While limiting horizontal scrolling, we executed a deep vertical scroll to the bottom of the interface to structurally map the platforms’ overarching “categorisation logics” (Lobato, Scarlata and Wils, 2024, p. 1334). Capturing this full vertical depth acts as a comprehensive map of the interface’s layout (Bonnard, 2025), allowing us to observe how the entire catalogue is hierarchically organised into thematic rows, and exposing how local children’s content is frequently marginalised out of sight. Titles placed in far-right horizontal slots or deep in the vertical scroll may be functionally invisible to young audiences.

Key Findings: Obstructed Discoverability Pathways for Australian Children’s Television

By longitudinally tracing the spatial “discovery arcs” of specific new local titles – such as *Tales from Outer Suburbia*, *Caper Crew*, and *Knee High Spies* – across different screens, our empirical audits reveal how interface architectures can restrict local content discoverability, even on public service platforms:

ABC Platforms (iview, ABC Kids, ABC Big Kids, and ABC Family)

As Australia’s primary home for local children’s television, the ABC possesses a high volume of local content. However, our interface audits demonstrate that new local

children's content can be difficult to find and is often overshadowed by international acquisitions and legacy franchises.

- **The Main iview Homepage:** The ABC employs dynamic, time-of-day curation strategies to promote local children's content, such as prominently featuring the new live-action title *Caper Crew* in an "After School Club" row at 4:00 pm. However, this prominence is sometimes undercut by interface choices. For instance, the adult-centric thumbnail used for *Caper Crew* on the main homepage – displaying a close-up of the adult lead actress – obscured its status as children's programming. Furthermore, outside of these targeted timeslots, children's content was typically relegated to the bottom of the interface, sitting between the 25th and 29th rows. Certain children's rows in this deep-scroll section, such as "For the Big Kids" and "ABC Kids Mix", were populated entirely by imported titles during some audits.
- **ABC Kids:** Our audits found a high density of local titles, consistently accounting for around 40% of the visible catalogue. Yet discoverability was heavily skewed toward legacy franchises. While the prominence of a culturally significant franchise like *Play School* is understandable – accounting for 18 of the 67 local visible programs in one audit, including a dedicated row – our audits found this heavy saturation can skew discoverability at the expense of other new local programming. For instance, new local title *Knee High Spies* often had obstructed discovery arcs; even when placed high vertically in the 3rd row ("ABC Kids Originals"), it was pushed out of sight to the 8th tile, requiring horizontal scrolling to be found. Otherwise, its vertical visibility fluctuated between the 5th and 9th rows on ABC Kids (or as low as the 18th row), or it was relegated to the 28th row ("Auslan on ABC Kids") on the main iview homepage.
- **ABC Big Kids:** Within this profile, the most visible "prime real estate" (the non-scrolling immediate view) tended to be dominated by international animation. The top "Featured" and "Trending" rows promoted overseas series like Cartoon Network titles *Summer Camp Island*, *Steven Universe*, and *Adventure Time*. During our audits, the "Trending" row frequently only contained overseas series. At times it would contain one Australian title – for instance the final option in the row being *The InBestigators* by scrolling to the right. While "Trending" rows may be based on viewing metrics, terms like "Trending" and Netflix-like tile appearance may impact the kinds of television content children see as most desirable (Balanzategui, Baker, and Clift, 2024). New local shows like *Caper Crew* and *Tales from Outer Suburbia* were found lower down in the rows such as "Wonders From Down Under" or "So Dramatic", at times requiring significant vertical and/or horizontal scrolling to discover. Notably the "Wonders From Down Under" row does dynamically move up in vertical positioning upon the arrival of a new local release or dependent on time of day (an audit at 8am for instance

revealed it to be in second position). *Caper Crew* could sometimes be found in the hero banner, but only by scrolling to the right – our audits found the program in the fifth position for some weeks before moving to the seventh. For all audits, the majority of titles in the hero banner were imported. For two audits, *Caper Crew* and *GG: Spawn Squad* were the only local titles out of the 12 options and both required horizontal scrolling to find. Notably, the hero banner changes dynamically: an audit at the time of writing identified brand new local release *Do Not Watch This Show* as the first program displayed on the hero banner. Yet during our audit period key international titles such as *Summer Camp Island* and *Steven Universe* tended to dominate this space.

- **ABC Family:** Shows like *Caper Crew* and *Shaun Tan's Tales from Outer Suburbia* could be found via dynamic, cross-category "discovery arcs" – being prominently featured across diverse thematic rows such as "What to Watch on ABC Family" and "Watch Together This Weekend". During one specific audit of the ABC Family page, researchers identified 30 Australian texts out of a possible 144 tiles across 18 rows. Encouragingly, 21 of these local texts were situated in the first ten rows. Yet our audits reveal the most valuable "prime real estate," such as the hero banners on the ABC Family profile, is frequently allocated to international franchises such as US series *Steven Universe*. *Caper Crew* sometimes could be found in this banner with horizontal scrolling, ranging from second to fourth position. Our child audience research is currently investigating whether young users frequently use the horizontal scroll features in hero banners or predominantly vertically scroll. Consequently, Australian content was occasionally prominently curated, yet international titles sat at the point of highest visibility in the interface hierarchy.

SVOD Platforms: Focus on Netflix and Stan

On Netflix, local content was virtually absent from prime real estate. There were no Australian children's titles visible in the first ten rows of the main homepage for any of the audits. In one audit, only two rows promoted Australian children's shows: the 18th row "Feel-Good TV Shows" included *Little Lunch* if users scrolled to the right, and the 27th row "Australian Movies & TV" featured three local children's shows interspersed with titles for older audiences. Notably, on the lead researcher's *personal* account, the newly acquired, acclaimed Australian series *Crazy Fun Park* – which migrated from ABC iView to Netflix in April 2026 during the period of interface capture – was briefly featured in personalised recommended content when it first arrived on the platform: "Today's Top Picks for You". However, our audit research revealed the program quickly disappeared from sight. *Crazy Fun Park* was functionally invisible on both the main Netflix and Netflix Kids homepages during our multi-week audit; it could only be located via a direct manual search. Furthermore, one audit counted only 18 Australian texts across the first 296 tiles of the Netflix Kids desktop profile (6.1% of the sampled content), and these

shows did not carry any "Australian" metadata tags so were difficult to identify as Australian. Another audit found only 13 unique Australian texts on Netflix Kids out of a total possible 450 tiles (first ten tiles of 45 rows): 2.89% of the sampled content.

On the Australian SVOD Stan, the new Australian children's film *Whale Shark Jack* – which released on April 2nd during the period of interface capture – could be found in the hero banner (typically requiring horizontal scrolling, fifth across) or in the first "Trending" row for an extended period (for instance, on the main home page April 12th and in the Kids "Trending" first row on 22nd May). Beyond this, local children's shows were difficult to find. On one audit on a desktop browser, there were no children's shows on the main homepage until the 24th/25th "Kids Collection" rows, collectively titled "Kids on Stan". These were all imported titles except for an icon for *The Wiggles*. On the "Kids" page, the first Australian title was an image of *The Wiggles* used for "ABC Kids", which appeared as the ninth tile of the third row (untitled), visible by scrolling horizontally to the right and preceded by categories such as "Cartoon Network", "Nickelodeon" and "DreamWorks". There were no other local shows until the seventh row "Primary School TV" which included *Legends of Akedo: Power Storm* as the ninth tile, an animated series made by Moose Toys. Australian titles were not prominent until the 15th row "The Wiggles" followed by 17th row "Aussie Favourites for Kids". In this row, seven of the first ten tiles were from *The Wiggles* franchise. Another audit found 35 Australian titles in the first 10 tiles of 28 rows, however 23 of these were *The Wiggles* titles.

Commercial BVODs

While commercial BVODs dedicate a high proportion of homepage promotional slots to Australian titles overall (Scarlata and Lobato, 2023), children's content is largely excluded from this prominence. On 9Now, the "Family" category was buried at the 22nd homepage position, and 23 of its 38 titles were imported Christmas films (24th April 2026), highlighting a blurring of genres that obscures dedicated local children's series. Similarly, 10Play's "Bigger Kids" hub relied heavily on 2000s US Nickelodeon series such as *Invader Zim* and *CatDog*. This suggests a content and catalogue organisation strategy that targets nostalgic adults rather than contemporary children.

Recommendations

As our accompanying in-depth report highlights (Balanzategui et al, 2026), Australian children's television plays a vital civic, public value function, but the sector is in a precarious position. In a climate in which fewer Australian children's shows are produced, discoverability of these shows on streaming platforms is vital. Yet our interface audits found that these shows can be difficult to find on platform interfaces. To fulfil the goals of the National Cultural Policy, we recommend two interventions:

1. **Mandate Prominence:** Require BVOD and SVOD platforms to ensure newly released Australian children's content occupies prime real estate (top vertical

rows and leftmost horizontal slots) within children's platform sections during a designated period after release.

2. **Standardise Metadata:** Require BVOD platforms to implement clear "Australian" tags to prevent local series from being obscured.

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Dr Merinda Staubli is a researcher at RMIT who has published on the remembered meanings and impacts of children's media. She is experienced in mixed methods research design, with a focus on audience and reception studies. Her forthcoming monograph, *Dark Programs for Creepy Kids: Resurrecting Millennial Children's Horror Television in Australia* (Bloomsbury), is based on her PhD research (RMIT 2022).

Max Kenyon is a PhD student and researcher at RMIT who focuses on video on-demand technologies and industries, and the manifestations of culture and society in contemporary media production. His thesis attends to the juncture between cultural specificity in film/TV and the global streaming environment, examining the local Australian streaming service Stan and its commercial representational strategies. His methods include media industry and VOD interface analysis, as well as in-depth textual and semiotic analysis.