



Submission to National Cultural Policy by Screen Voice
25th May 2026

Pre-ambble

There have been seismic shifts in the media landscape in recent years that have fundamentally impacted screen content creators. With those shifts have come some increased opportunities but also increased uncertainty. With big international conglomerates increasingly entering the fray, the field is not level. Fairness and equity are a constant battle for the Australian screen producer, that is getting harder and harder to fight. Jobs, Australian businesses and Australian stories are at stake.

With the majority of screen businesses small, there is a desperate need for increased **certainty and sustainability**. An excellent example of certainty in the industry via Government, is the Producer Tax Offset. This financial lever has become a fundamental building block upon which the modern industry has been built.

Another is the quota on streamers which, while small, will bring increased Australian content to our screens. We need more of such schemes and systems that producers can rely on to offer them increased certainty and enabling them to survive and thrive.

We do not have the solutions to the issues highlighted below but rather offer up as key issues that need to be discussed for the future health of the screen industry.

- 1) **Screen Australia.** Screen Australia's role is a challenging one; many competing mouths to feed across all genres. But it is fundamentally failing to perform its first and foremost primary function as defined in its Act of 2008:

1 (a) Support and promote a highly creative, innovative, and commercially sustainable Australian screen industry.

Its argument is it does not have enough money. A fair one perhaps, but it how it spends its money in the best interests of the industry, according to its Act that needs to be addressed. It tends to lean on its perceived role as a cultural agency. This however is not its primary function. A balance between cultural and commercial needs to be struck with the bias towards commercial to make businesses more sustainable.

While it is important that projects that might not be seen as commercial, need to be supported, especially First Nations projects, this should not be at the detriment of commercial projects.

Screen Australia's approach needs to be more holistic where systems and individual companies are viewed as complete, interconnected wholes rather than a collection of separate parts; it needs to respond to the marketplace. It needs to actively seek programmes and policies that offer producers increased certainty rather than less. At present its position is it cannot offer certainty only clarity that there is no certainty.

The only eligible applicant to Screen Australia is a producer. They are in effect, its clients. Therefore, the needs of the producer should be at the centre of all its decision making. The central need for any producer is sustainability. Supporting more of them to be more creative, innovative and commercially sustainable as per the Act, should be the focus. This cultural shift in thinking could transform the agency, making it more effective and efficient.

An example of a policy that is not focused on sustainability is its lack of support for returnable series beyond 2 or 3 series. Returnable series are fundamental to sustainability of any company. Screen Australia argues it does not have enough money to have such a policy, this maybe a fair argument. If it did support returnable series, it would be unable to fund a more diverse slate of projects. But there is also an internal cultural attitude that if you have made 2 or 3 series the project should be self-sustaining. Unfortunately, this is not the reality for most projects. Without Screen Australia filling the gap, it is often impossible to fill from the market-place. This means it is often a disadvantage for a project to come into Screen Australia if it is designed to be returnable.

- 2) **Role of Public Broadcasters.** The success of VOD services has led to increased rights demanded by broadcasters across the board, often with no compensation. The power dynamic between producer and broadcaster is not equal. The broadcaster holds the power. They traditionally are the avenue to getting a project financed. In a highly competitive market, they have the pick of the projects. A rights grab is increasing taking place, reducing the producers' ability to exploit their rights and make money from their projects and thereby have an ability to be more sustainable. Increasingly the ABC, is guilty of this aggressive posture, demanding increased rights with no compensation to the producer. We seek that the ABC and SBS work with the industry to come up with sustainable models for producers for the future.
- 3) **Australian Content.** Fairness and equity must be embedded in the deals and rights owned by the producer. Government can aid in this. Australians must be able to retain IP and for that retention to be flexible.

If the aim of Government was to assist vulnerable genres such as documentary and Children's, then this is not happening. Children's has only one consistent

door in Australia and that is the ABC. This stifles creativity, diversity and volume and gives the ABC incredible power when dealing with the producer over rights. The loss of quotas for commercial TV, no sub-quotas on Streamers and no other mechanism for children's content to get on any other network, has led to a massive reduction in Australian children's content that needs to be addressed.

- 4) **Offset reform.** A review of the Offset is required, to look at what it is doing and how best it should be re-worked in the best interest of the industry with the main objective being sustainability.

Included in this needs to be an increase for TV to 40%, in line with theatrical release projects, PDV reform to allow among other genres, theatrical documentaires. Removal of 65 hour cap for documentaries in line with scripted.