

National Cultural Policy Submission

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21 August 2022

Submission to the National Cultural Policy Enquiry

Australia did very well at the Commonwealth Games. We came first, doing better than countries with populations and economies much larger than ours. This is due in a large part to the high level of support given to sport by our federal government over many years. Imagine how well we would perform on the screens and stages and in the galleries and bookshops of the world if we gave the same level of support to Australian culture.

All of my comments below relate to our screen culture and in particular the scripted programs, the dramas and comedies, documentaries and children's programs that we watch on our screens at home. This is the area of my involvement in Australian Culture and the area that I know best.

Australia is proud of being one of the most successfully diverse countries in the world. We should make sure that our diversity is properly represented in our media and that its richness and stability is reflected in the stories we tell to ourselves and to the world.

We are in the process of considering a change to the Constitution which would give Indigenous Australians a Voice to Parliament. An important part of this process is to make sure that First Nations Australians also have a Voice in our media so that they can tell their stories to the rest of the country and to the world. This is part of the truth telling that is called for in the Uluru Statement from the Heart.

But to do all this means making sure that there is space on our home screens for our stories to be available. They can't be seen if they're not there and at the moment there are not enough of them.

If we want our children to grow up learning about our country and its history and its culture, then they need to be able to see Australian stories, told in Australian accents, reflecting Australian values and ideas on their screens at home. Already, the softening of children's television content rules for Free to Air television has led to a substantial reduction in programs made here in Australia for our children.

We are moving from a world where all television was delivered over regulated free to air broadcasting to one where virtually all the dramas, comedies and children's programs on our home screens arrive via unregulated streaming companies. These streaming services are dominated by international companies based in the US.

What we need is regulation to create some space for Australian programs in the same way that Local Content rules created space in broadcast television. One way to do this is to require all organisations which deliver program content to our home screens to spend a minimum amount, based on their revenue from Australia on commissioning and delivering Australian scripted content. And the content must be written, produced and directed by Australians.

In addition to regulation, we also need strong institutions to deliver this content and to support its creation. This means continuing strong support and reliable funding for the ABC, SBS, NITV, the Australia Council and Screen Australia.

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