

National Cultural Policy Submission

Screen Queensland

Submitted: On behalf of government or government body

SUBMISSION FROM SCREEN QUEENSLAND

Screen stories and experiences play a central role in people's lives, connecting diverse cultures, nations and communities. During recent challenges of the pandemic, the global explosion in screen consumption shows the power of stories to comfort, heal and dismantle barriers.

Seeing Australian stories on screen is a reminder of what makes us Australian, our unique and evolving identities. As such these stories should reflect the rich diversity of our country and its people – in particular the lived experience of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians. Screen storytelling can be entertaining, but more importantly it is a potent force for healing, connection and belonging.

We should celebrate Australia and all its diversity on screen, while ensuring the local industry is well-placed to benefit, both culturally and economically, from the ongoing global screen content boom.

Throughout our submission "screen" stands for film, television, streaming, animation and games, unless otherwise indicated.

First Nations – Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Screen Content

Queensland is a unique state presenting an opportunity for cultivation, curation, inspiration and education of the wider nation through Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander owned and created screen content. We prefer the use of "Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander" in recognition of the precious, and distinct, cultural legacy of the Torres Strait Islander community in the Far North.

Our recommendation is that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander languages and culture are preserved and showcased through screen content. NITV's *Strait to the Plate* series (supported by Screen Queensland) is a window to the people, culture,

language and food of the Torres Strait Islands region. This series also created jobs and training opportunities for local creatives. Another example is the recent SBS/NITV series *True Colours*, which features the Arrernte language (with sub-titles) for much of the dialogue. Not only is this a powerful message for all Australians, but a compelling signifier to the world about the value Australia places on Aboriginal peoples and Torres Strait Islander peoples as the Traditional Custodians of the land and sea.

A regional focus on developing Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander creative practitioners will help to create opportunities in the screen sector, giving rise to skills development, authentic storytelling and multiple pathways to entry. Screen Queensland supported short documentary, *Sistas in Mining*, created by Cairns-based Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander creative Shontell Ketchell, is a unique story of a First Nations woman working in mining, airing on SBS as part of its Curious Australia initiative.

It is incumbent upon all of us – industry and government working together – to encourage, protect, preserve and promote stories from Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities.

These stories must be widely distributed in Australia, ensuring more Australians share in the cultural connection made possible through Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander screen content. These stories are also critical in presenting contemporary Australia, a nation proud of its Indigenous past and deeply respectful of its First Nations peoples and cultures, to the rest of the world.

A range of investments and incentives should be leveraged at a national level, to ensure these stories emerge on mainstream platforms including streaming and social media platforms, not just the public service broadcasters.

A Place for Every Story

Ensuring diversity in the screen industry, takes a commitment to growing skilled screen workforces and supporting emerging practitioners, from all walks of life, to overcome barriers to enter the industry.

Currently, across Australia and internationally, skills shortages (alongside a lack of screen infrastructure) are a major impediment to growth at a time when the demand for screen content continues to increase.

Over the past two years, Queensland has witnessed a production boom in film, television, and games. This gives rise to economic and job opportunities and creates

valuable cultural contributions for the state and the country. Continuity of work is now, like never before, a realistic aim for many in the industry. But keeping up with demand requires a dynamic response from industry and government to ensure skills match demand.

Screen Queensland supports an immediate and co-ordinated Federal response to the skills shortage issue, in order to ensure opportunities for the current and sustained content boom are harnessed.

The screen industry is a powerful sector providing an incredibly diverse range of jobs. Our view is that, collectively, we can promote the power of screen, and a career in screen, giving pathways for students, as well as those with transferable skills wishing to enter the industry. Retaining screen practitioners is also a challenge in an industry that is demanding and, at times, unpredictable.

Screen Queensland supports professional placements and attachments across the screen productions we fund. This needs to be matched at the Federal level to ensure on-the-job training opportunities in both local and international production on shore. In particular, ensuring a pathway for under-represented groups to access training in the industry, will provide a better, more diverse workforce for the future growth of the screen arts.

Games

Games play a central role in the lives of many Australians, intersecting in a cultural, entertainment and technology space. The exponential growth of the games industry globally represents a significant opportunity for Australia, with the potential to increase GDP through export.

Screen Queensland is committed to expanding the state's local games industry, by attracting businesses into the state, growing local games companies, and expanding the developer talent pool.

As with screen stories, supporting and protecting local content creation for games is a key priority. Queensland-created and Screen Queensland-supported game, *Unpacking*, won the UK's 2022 BAFTA for Game of the Year and our Games program – including incentives, grants and upskilling – aims to foster more Australian exports of this calibre. Screen Queensland supports the new Federal government games tax offset at 30 per cent. Its continuation is vital to the sustainability of games developers in Australia – big and small – to ensure that once the critical mass of skills is established, it is not lost overseas should incentive levels vary.

Screen Australia's Games Enterprise funding should be reinstated to help support games businesses in a time where global competition for talent is fierce.

Strong Institutions

The removal of the children's quota and the drama quota on free TV in Australia saw an immediate decline in the development and creation of these formats. The lack of Australian stories on screen is particularly concerning for children when it comes to forming a strong sense of national identity and belonging, as well as an appreciation of our nation's diversity and its Indigenous heritage.

In its upfront representation of contemporary family life, the animated hit series *Bluey* (created in Queensland and supported by Screen Queensland) is a powerful tool in soft diplomacy, exporting the Australian way of life around the globe. Not only do Australian children and their parents see their own stories reflected on screen, but the rest of the world gets to enjoy uniquely Australian humour and values. The producers' refusal to dub the show with American voices for the U.S. market stands as a strong signal of pride in our national culture and identity.

Ongoing funding and certainty for the Australian Children's Television Foundation can help uncover the *Bluey's* of the future. There is a further opportunity to develop children's content in the First Nations space, such as ABC's *Little J and Big Cuz* and NITV's *Barrumbi Kids*.

Diverse Australian drama on our screens is equally critical to our nation's cultural health and expression. Screen Queensland is supporting the Netflix screen adaptation of best-selling novel *Boy Swallows Universe* by Queensland author Trent Dalton as part of our commitment to ensuring Australian voices, in all of their diversity, are seen and heard on screen.

Screen Queensland supports a meaningful quota of 20 per cent original Australian content on all streaming platforms (AVOD, BVOD and SVOD). This will create a valuable economic and cultural cycle of development, production, employment and export potential -- and give Australians more places to see their stories on screen. Further, streaming platforms should ensure that Australian content on their platforms is easily discoverable. Anything more than "two clicks" is a deterrent to audiences.

The Federal Government should support better terms of trade for the local independent production sector in their negotiations with VOD platforms. New regulation which caps the global rights positions that VODs can acquire on Australian-created content, as part

of their expenditure obligations, should be explored. Some European territories are currently implementing similar rules.

Australia's public broadcasters - ABC and SBS/NITV - play a pivotal role in the cultural health of the nation. By investing directly in the development and production of diverse local content (along with Screen Australia), they directly impact the scale and value of the screen sector, as well as providing valuable training opportunities for the screen industry.

The reduction in funding to these institutions over several years has impacted on the local screen industry, meaning less avenues and less money to create Australian stories. With strong, well-funded public broadcasters comes the opportunity for the creation of more, exportable content.

Sustainability of the Screen Industry

What the industry most needs and wants is sustainability – economic, social and environmental. By nature, the screen industry can be unpredictable, subject as it is to external factors such as exchange rates, market demand, economic shifts and global trends. However, the current global appetite for screen content, which shows no sign of slowing down, presents an enormous opportunity for Australia, so long as certain measures are maintained or introduced. Key barriers to sustainability include the skills and infrastructure shortage, alongside uncertainty around incentives and funding for key institutions.

Authentic consultation across diverse communities within the sector will be invaluable in understanding how best to achieve long-term sustainability for the industry. Additionally, success should be measured not only against economic drivers such as growth, but also cultural and societal worth.

With the production boom of international film and TV series in Queensland, and the resulting jobs growth in the screen industry, we are advocating for the certainty of a 30 per cent Federal Location offset. Australia competes globally to attract screen production to our shores. A fixed, transparent offset will encourage more high-end film and TV production here and avoid the "peaks and troughs" of past years of production. This will lead to studio facilities being occupied, plus a diverse range of on-screen and behind-the-camera crew enjoying constant employment – something many people take for granted.

And it supports the entire ecosystem of Australian businesses working in the screen sector – for example the post-production industry. Many of these Australian-owned businesses are small-medium enterprises, providing valuable employment and training opportunities. As SMEs these businesses require sustained support in order to grow and retain staff.

Screen Queensland also supports a coordinated and urgent national response to the climate crisis as it relates to the screen industry. On the state level, we have invested in developing a sustainability roadmap to address this issue, but believe a national approach is required for real change to occur by 2030.