

28 May 2021

Committee Secretary
Senate Standing Committees on Environment and Communications
PO Box 6100
Parliament House
Canberra ACT 2600

By email: ec.sen@aph.gov.au

Dear Secretary

Broadcasting Legislation Amendment (2021 Measures) Bill No.1 2021

We refer to the legislation above and welcome the opportunity to make a submission to the Committee's inquiry into the Bill. We would like to comment on Schedule 1 of the Bill, relating to the New Eligible Drama Expenditure (NEDE) Scheme for subscription television.

The Australian Screen Sound Guild (ASSG) represents the profession of sound in film, television, and other screen and media industries. Members include those who work in production (location sound during principal photography) and post-production (sound editing and mixing). Our members are highly skilled and well-regarded, with many of them recipients of numerous Australian and international awards - including six individuals who are winners of Academy Awards for Sound Editing and Sound Mixing. But even the highest of awards do not guarantee future work.

ASSG members are directly impacted by the various forms of government regulation on the screen and sound industries, including those that affect investment in the production of programme. The impact of reducing investment relates directly to employment opportunities for our members.

ASSG does not support Schedule 1 of the Bill and the halving of the pay television requirement to invest in Australian drama.

Despite changing market conditions, it remains important for pay TV customers to have access to Australian stories and Australian voices. The proposed cut will not only damage cultural outcomes but will also result in a contraction of the local production industry, and hence a loss of local jobs.

We note the NEDE scheme has created a wealth of high-quality cultural product for Australian audiences, including such notable and award-winning titles as *Top of the*

Lake, Hacksaw Ridge, Lion, Love My Way, Wentworth, Devil's Playground, Deadline Gallipoli, Fight Season, Mr Inbetween, Picnic at Hanging Rock, Secret City and Tangle.

Given Foxtel has argued for complete deregulation, we are concerned that any reduction in the level of obligation will result in a redirection of investment away from Australian drama. The fact that recent levels of investment are at or about the minimum required amount, this suggests regulation is the determining factor in that content being created.

We bring to the Committee's attention the Government's current consideration of regulation to ensure popular streaming services are contributing to Australian content. This is a key regulatory setting that will help determine the future of Australian content.

A decision on the future of the NEDE scheme should be delayed until the Government has determined the shape of regulation on streaming services and has moved to implement that regulation. This will ensure a holistic policy decision can be made and will help avoid a contractionary impact on the local industry.

At that point, the NEDE scheme should be thoroughly reviewed, with consideration given to whether it should be extended to cover other genres of Australian programming which are vulnerable to market failure.

We are also concerned that the Bill proposes to cancel the existing requirement to make-up any shortfall in expenditure that occurred before 1 July 2021. Given the generous deregulation included in the Bill, this seems excessive, and all previous regulatory obligations should be required to be honoured.

Thank you again for the opportunity to provide a submission.

Yours sincerely,

Stephen Murphy
President, ASSG