

## Submission to the Environment and Communications References Committee Australian content on broadcast, radio and streaming services January 2018

### Key Points

- The Special Broadcasting Service Corporation (**SBS**) is critical to building understanding and cohesion in our society. In a world where audience choice continues to expand, SBS continues to make a vital difference to the Australian cultural and media landscape.
- The 2016 Census shows that Australia has never been more culturally diverse than it is today—49 per cent of Australians were either born overseas or have one or both parents born overseas, and 21 per cent of us speak a language other than English at home.
- SBS is delivering on its Charter with a distinctive program offering compared with other networks. We are continuing to evolve to meet the needs of contemporary multicultural and Indigenous Australia like no other media organisation.
- SBS has been a continuous leader in adapting to the evolving media consumption preferences of Australian audiences in the delivery of content, and utilising the latest technology advancements to create a deeper audience experience.
- In this context it is timely that the Australian Government reviews policy, tax and direct funding settings to ensure that they remain fit for purpose. This means that they should support the most efficient production of content across a range of platforms.
- Where screen or audio content—such as that aimed at supporting Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander (**ATSI**) children—addresses multiple public policy aims, this should be acknowledged and formal policy linkages should be made.
- To the extent that revised policy and funding settings encourage and support higher levels of Australian content, SBS looks forward to playing an even greater role in supporting the Australian screen industry for the benefit of all Australians.



## Introduction

SBS welcomes the opportunity to submit to the Inquiry into Australian content on broadcast, radio and streaming services that was referred to the Senate Environment and Communications References Committee in October 2017 (the **Inquiry**).

Among a number of recent inquiries and reviews on similar matters, this process provides an important opportunity to demonstrate both the:

- economic and cultural value of the Australian content SBS provides on broadcast, radio and streaming services; and
- funding and policy settings required to ensure SBS continues to deliver these benefits to Australians.

SBS's submission is structured as follows:

- **Part A** explains SBS's distinctive and indispensable place in the Australian media landscape, and the evolution of our services in-line with changing audience viewing habits.
- **Part B** sets out SBS's economic contribution to the creative industries as part of the broader economic contribution of the Australian screen sector.
- **Part C** demonstrates the importance and uniqueness of SBS's local content, and recommends funding and policy settings that will ensure SBS can increase its impact, including through the production of more NITV content, that reflect the experience of ATSI children.

The services provided by SBS deliver the Australian community quality and diversity in television, radio and online content with highly valued and trusted programming that cannot be found in other Australian media outlets. However, these activities cannot be sustained unless there are robust funding arrangements in place. Continued and increased funding to SBS for the development of quality multiplatform Australian content is of vital importance to both SBS and the health of the wider industry.

### **Part A – SBS's distinctive and indispensable place in the Australian media landscape**

The 2016 Census showed that more than a quarter of Australians were born overseas,<sup>1</sup> almost half have at least one parent born overseas, and 21% per cent (4.87 million people) speak a language other than English at home.<sup>2</sup>

In this context, and as Australia's multilingual and multicultural public broadcaster, SBS is more critical now than ever to building understanding and cohesion in our society. In a world where audience choice continues to expand, SBS continues to make a vital difference to the Australian cultural and media landscape. The network's unique position allows it to develop and present compelling, distinctive and thought-provoking content that no other Australian media organisation provides.

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<sup>1</sup> <http://www.sbs.com.au/news/article/2017/06/26/census-2016-five-ways-australia-getting-more-diverse>.

<sup>2</sup> <http://www.abs.gov.au/ausstats/abs@.nsf/lookup/Media%20Release3>.





Some of this content is targeted to the needs of particular groups or communities, whether by language or subject matter. Other content is of broader appeal, helping to promote SBS's stories of our multicultural society to as many Australians as possible.<sup>3</sup>

SBS reaches almost 100 per cent of the population through its six free-to-air TV channels (SBS, SBS HD, SBS VICELAND, SBS VICELAND HD, Food Network and National Indigenous Television (**NITV**)) and eight radio stations (SBS Radio 1, 2 3 and 4, SBS Arabic24 including SBS PopDesi, SBS Chill and SBS PopAsia). Engagement is being significantly extended through SBS's digital services, including SBS On Demand and portals which make online audio programming and information available in nearly 70 languages other than English.

SBS has made continued investment in exclusive and distinctive content, as it provides more than 6,000 hours of programming across more than 10 distribution platforms. This includes exclusive premiere titles across key genres of drama, film and documentary, including SBS commissioned content scheduled and distributed across television and digital platforms.

Through content across all our platforms, SBS inspires a richer, more holistic understanding of our world and presents surprising perspectives in entertaining and innovative ways.

### SBS delivering on its Charter

SBS has an important role to play in the Australian media landscape. SBS's principal function, as outlined in the SBS Charter, is to provide multilingual and multicultural radio, television and digital media services that inform, educate and entertain all Australians and, in doing so, reflect Australia's multicultural society.

SBS is delivering on its Charter by continuing to evolve to meet the needs of contemporary multicultural and Indigenous Australia like no other media organisation.

#### **Key SBS programming in 2017**

The fulfilment of SBS's purpose—to inspire all Australians to explore, appreciate and celebrate our diverse world and in doing so, contribute to a cohesive society—is predominantly realised through the distinctive and compelling programs and services delivered across our many platforms. It was with great pride that SBS brought the Charter and purpose to life across television, radio and online in 2017.

#### **Sunshine**

*Sunshine* explores the hopes and heartbreak felt by those forging a new life in a foreign land. Set in Melbourne's outer-west suburb of Sunshine, the story follows a young, aspiring South Sudanese-Australian basketball player whose dreams hang in the balance when he's drawn into a

<sup>3</sup> SBS acquires some general interest programming to complement its distinctive multicultural and multilingual programming. General interest programming, such as English-language, popular movies, can be used to cross-promote our more challenging and unique programming, drawing new audiences and raising awareness among existing audiences. Advertising revenue for the general interest programming is also reinvested into the creation of locally commissioned content.





criminal investigation. *Sunshine* is a powerful, bold, and uniquely SBS drama that speaks right to the heart of the SBS Charter—exploring themes of identity and belonging, class and race inequality and the nature and construction of truth. The *Australians Today* report noted that “Experience of discrimination over the last 12 months is at the highest level among some African groups, with discrimination indicated by 53% of those born in Egypt, 60% Ethiopia, 67% Kenya, 75% Zimbabwe, and 77% South Sudan.”<sup>4</sup> This series focused on a positive representation of the South Sudanese community in Australia, further contributing to SBS’s purpose of building social cohesion. Alongside esteemed actors, the series also featured somenew faces, including a stellar South Sudanese Australian cast being seen for the very first time on Australian TV. In 2017, *Sunshine* won the best mini-series category at the 2017AACTA Awards.

#### **Little J and Big Cuz**

NITV presented *Little J and Big Cuz*, a contemporary children’s animation series offering a proud and positive view of Indigenous Australia and the opportunities for learning within it, to Indigenous children as they prepare for school. Featuring some of Australia’s best Indigenous writers and directors, and voices of some of the country’s most prominent Indigenous talent, *Little J and Big Cuz* follows five year old Little J and his cousin, nine year old Big Cuz, as they explore themes of identity, connection to country, traditional knowledge and cultural practices. It is Australia’s first animation series featuring Indigenous children, allowing them to see themselves on screen in a positive and fun way.

#### **The Family Law**

*The Family Law* series one was warmly received by audiences and widely praised not only for its humour and warm-hearted tone, but also for putting a predominantly Asian-Australian cast on mainstream Australian screens for the first time. Series two, in mid-2017, explored even more deeply, themes around the complexities of families, interracial relationships and Asian-Australian culture. The final season of the award-winning drama, will broadcast on SBS in 2018.

#### **Face Up to Racism**

In early 2017, SBS featured a special week of programming exploring racism and prejudice in Australia today, with the aim of provoking an important national discussion about the issues. Face Up to Racism week featured three new commissioned documentaries, along with a range of other programs across the network including special episodes of *Dateline* and *Insight*, programs on SBS VICELAND, NITV and SBS On Demand, as well as discussion across SBS Radio.

#### **Eurovision**

Australians have embraced Eurovision since SBS’s first broadcast more than 30 years ago and feel incredible warmth and admiration for the countries, their cultures and the contest’s celebration of difference, aptly reflected in the 2017 contest theme, Celebrate Diversity. Eurovision semi-finals and grand final were broadcast by SBS on television, as well as live-streamed through SBS On Demand.

#### **Upcoming SBS programming in 2018**

In 2018, SBS will launch five new commissioned dramas, including psychological thriller *Safe Harbour* and crime drama *Dead Lucky*, alongside the returning and final series of the much-loved *The Family Law*. Australia’s most awarded documentary series *Go Back to Where You Came From* will return, but as an ambitious live TV event *Go Back Live*, and a new series entitled *Where Are You Really From?*, will explore Australia’s multicultural communities living in regional Australia.

<sup>4</sup> Scanlon Foundation, *Australians Today*, page 4 <http://scanlonfoundation.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2016/08/Australians-Today.pdf>





#### **Grace Beside Me**

*Grace Beside Me* is a rich and humorous coming-of-age story adapted from the award winning novel of the same name by Sue McPherson. *Grace Beside Me* is the story of an extraordinary girl trying to lead an ordinary life. The series tells the charming story of an Indigenous girl Fuzzy Mac, who just wants to be an ordinary teenager and have fun with her mates. But that's not so easy when Fuzzy's ancestors have other plans and she keeps seeing ghosts!

#### **Safe Harbour**

*Safe Harbour* is a bold new psychological thriller about a group of friends whose sailing holiday of a lifetime alters their lives forever after they cross paths with a struggling fishing boat overloaded with asylum seekers en-route to Australia. *Safe Harbour* will air over four weeks in March 2018.

#### **Marry Me, Marry My Family**

Over three weeks, *Marry Me, Marry My Family* followed six couples as they tried to straddle the gulf between cultures and the gap between their parents' expectations and their own dreams. The observational documentary series placed audiences at the front table of diverse, multicultural weddings and provided intimate access to the couples and their families, through the tears and joy, as they prepared to tie the knot.

#### **World Cup**

SBS's goal has always been to deliver the very best of world football to Australian audiences. The 2018 FIFA World Cup in Russia is a highlight of SBS's sports offering. SBS will offer 25 premium games all live, free and in high definition, all of which will also be available to stream live on *The World Game* website and the official World Cup app. All 64 games will also be available live on SBS Radio. All Australians will be able to catch every single goal, from every single game across multiple platforms along with our comprehensive and trusted analysis, for which SBS is so renowned.

In executing its Charter, SBS is strongly supportive of, and provides services that meet, the communications needs of Australia's multicultural society, with the aim of encouraging participation of all cultures in Australian civic and economic life.

For migrants, this is both an immediate and a long-term need: migrants need immediate assistance in establishing a life in Australia, while also requiring long-term support in language development and maintenance, cultural understanding and cohesion, and links to their home country.

For ATSI Australians, SBS and NITV play an indispensable role in providing screen content that inspires, instils pride and aims to lead to greater respect of ATSI culture.

The broader Australian community also benefits from enhanced understanding of the diversity that comes with Australia's multicultural experience. Achieving this balance means that all Australians can enjoy a multicultural and socially cohesive society.

Building connections between the many different cultures that make up Australia is at the heart of SBS. SBS seeks to inspire greater understanding between diverse communities and contributes to the health of our vibrant and cohesive multicultural society.



### **Supporting social cohesion**

Alongside SBS's television, radio and streaming content, SBS undertakes a number of other activities to impact social cohesion, and to serve multicultural, multilingual and wider audiences across Australia.

### **SBS National Languages Competition**

In late July, SBS Radio launched its second SBS National Languages Competition, which encouraged and celebrated the love of learning languages. Students were invited to create a video (up to 30 seconds long) summarising "What learning a language means to me?", in a language other than English.

### **Reconciliation Film Club**

SBS, NITV and Reconciliation Australia have proudly partnered to launch the Reconciliation Film Club, an online platform that supports organisations in hosting screenings of a curated selection of Indigenous documentaries from Australia's leading Indigenous filmmakers.

### **SBS Learn resources**

SBS extends its content reach through the provision of educational resources tied to key programming. For example, in late 2017, SBS Learn teamed up with *Small Business Secrets* and teachers from Tara Anglican School for Girls to develop ten new case studies designed to give students practical insight into real business challenges.

## SBS offering is evolving with viewing habits

The Australian film and television industry is experiencing a period of significant change. The video streaming market continues to be extremely competitive, with local and international subscription video on demand and other free-to-air television catch-up services disrupting traditional television viewer behaviour and gaining a further foothold with audiences.

The *ACMA Communications report 2016–17* highlighted these changes in delivery of audio and video content, including viewing behaviours for television, subscription and online content. Although television remains a dominant form of viewing, the report observed a steady decline in free-to-air (FTA) viewing over the last six years<sup>5</sup>, accompanied by an increase in availability and consumer enthusiasm for subscription video on demand (SVOD) services.<sup>6</sup>

SBS has been a continuous leader in adapting to the evolving media consumption preferences of Australian audiences in the delivery of content, and utilising the latest technology advancements to create a deeper audience experience.

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<sup>5</sup> "There has been a gradual decline in audience reach of FTA television over the last six years, with 82 per cent of Australian adults in the five major cities watching at least five minutes of FTA television in an average week in 2016–17, compared to 89 per cent in 2010–11. Regional markets have also seen a decline in audience viewing, decreasing from 87 per cent to 79 per cent" (Page 71).

<sup>6</sup> <https://www.acma.gov.au/-/media/Research-and-Analysis/Report/pdf/Communications-report-2016-17-pdf.pdf?la=en>  
Page 4 and 5



SBS On Demand, as well as SBS’s digital audio streaming services and podcasts, continue to experience strong growth year-on-year, engaging more audiences than ever before (see Figure 1, below).

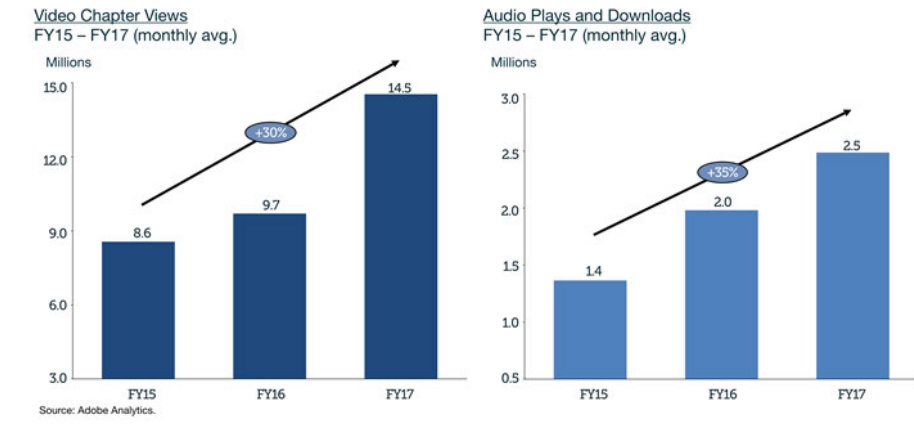


Figure 1: SBS audience engagement across digital platforms



## Part B – Contribution to the economy of the screen industries

A 2016 Deloitte Access Economics report for Screen Australia, noted that:

*[t]he Broad screen sector in Australia had a total estimated economic contribution of approximately \$2.6 billion in value add to Australia's GDP and 20,158 FTE jobs to national employment in 2014-15.<sup>7</sup>*

Of this, the free-to-air television sector made up almost \$800 million, and 3,646 full time equivalent jobs. SBS is a small but important player in Australia's screen industry, commissioning over 150 hours of television content in 2016-17<sup>8</sup> (not including in-house production of news, current affairs and sport) and commissioned more than 100 different Australian production companies in 2017. SBS's commissioning focus is on multicultural and multilingual programming and, increasing on-screen, and behind-the-camera diversity in the sector.

New distribution platforms are creating a changing context for the distribution of Australian content. International distribution and investment in the Australian screen industry remains paramount to the development of local content industries.

This is particularly a focus for drama, as the value of rest-of-world rights for drama content has substantially increased in recent years. This is due in large part to the buying power of large international platforms. For example, a number of SBS titles, including *Danger 5*, *The Principal*, and *Deep Water* have been sold to international streaming services. Other SBS titles, such as *Gourmet Farmer*, have been sold to local Australian platforms such as Stan. This provides SBS with an income stream which can be used to make the programs themselves, and which can be reinvested into the creation of new and unique Australian content aligned to the SBS Charter.

Equally, the export of Australian programs has positive benefits to the Australian screen industry as a whole. When SBS content, or indeed content from other Australian media outlets, is exported to the world via sales to international platforms, this brings exposure to Australia's considerable talent, both on screen and production creatives. These content rights are sold in different exhibition windows, and for different platforms. This delivers a return on investment, while ensuring that Australian audiences have free and open access to Australian content in its initial window.

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<sup>7</sup> <https://www.screenaustralia.gov.au/getmedia/13dceb59-0a88-432f-adb3-958fcc04e6bb/Deloitte-Access-Economics-Screen-Currency.pdf> Page 14

<sup>8</sup> SBS Annual Report 2017, p 130.





## Part C – Local content funding and policy settings

### Television

#### *Australian content quota*

The fulfilment of SBS's purpose – to inspire all Australians to explore, appreciate and celebrate our diverse world and in doing so, contribute to a cohesive society – is predominantly realised through the distinctive and compelling programs and services SBS delivered across many platforms. At a time of increasing fractures in multiculturalism globally, SBS is an important voice helping to share insights and understanding of Indigenous, migrant and other diverse communities' values and stories within a broader Australian landscape. Our ambition is to inspire our audiences to seek new perspectives which drive a greater acceptance of our many cultures and lead to deeper connections between our diverse communities.

While SBS has significantly lifted the proportion of its expenditure invested in Australian television content over recent years<sup>9</sup>, SBS would welcome the implementation of a fully-funded content quota on its primary channel. A quota of around 30% in peak viewing times is recommended to adequately deliver on audience expectations of the network.

This is in line with the 2012 findings of the *Convergence Review*, which suggested a 27.5% Australian content quota for SBS, noting that:

*...public broadcasters have a mission to support Australian content in meeting their charter obligations. The lower quota for the SBS [compared to the proposed 55% quota for ABC] recognises its mission to reflect multiculturalism to Australians and the need to achieve this objective partly through international content.<sup>10</sup>*

The implementation of this quota would require an increase to SBS's current commissioning budget. Actual costs would depend on genre focus, available screen agency funding, and government support.

SBS is the most efficient broadcaster in Australia and continues to maximise investments in content and the delivery of services to all Australians. As such, SBS is not in a position to increase its Australian content without additional funding.

#### **Recommendation**

**A fully-funded Australian content quota for SBS main channel, to deliver more SBS Charter-aligned content to the community, and support the Australian screen industry.**

#### *Producer Offset*

<sup>9</sup> 60% content expenditure in FY2013 to 68% content expenditure in FY2016.

<sup>10</sup> [http://www.abc.net.au/mediawatch/transcripts/1339\\_convergence.pdf](http://www.abc.net.au/mediawatch/transcripts/1339_convergence.pdf)



SBS has previously submitted to government, most recently in its submission to the *Australian and Children's Screen Content Review*, on the value of raising the Producer Offset from 20 per cent to 40 per cent for all television productions currently covered by the initiative, including premium documentary. This would be equivalent to the Producer Offset currently available to feature film productions.

SBS understands there is broad industry support for this position given that the cultural objectives of presenting Australian stories can be achieved on television as they can in feature films.





### Recommendation

**Increase the Producer offset** for television drama and documentaries to 40% (from the current 20%).

#### *Free-to-air distribution*

Direct government funding provided to the screen industry is for the development of Australian content, primarily for Australian audiences. Currently, some of this funding is being provided to projects which are only available to audiences who pay for access to subscription television or streaming services (such as *Wentworth* on Foxtel, and *No Activity* on Stan). According to an August 2017 Telsyte survey, slightly less than half of Australians are able, or choose to, pay for subscription television or SVOD services, meaning that more than 50%<sup>11</sup> of Australians do not have the opportunity to consume this content which is supported by Australian government funding.

Where direct government funding is provided to a project, that content should in a timely manner be required to have a free-to-air window, so that all Australians have the opportunity to consume the benefits of the tax-payer funded program or project.

This will maximise the value of the government's investment in the content and benefit the Australian community as a whole—not just those who can afford to pay an additional subscription fee. While projects may appear on a subscription television or streaming services for the initial window, it should be a condition of the grant of public funding that there be a distribution agreement for these projects to have a second window on free-to-air television.

### Recommendation

Projects receiving direct government funding must have a **free-to-air distribution window**.

#### SBS Radio

A recent *GfK Radio Insights* study found that radio is the most trusted media in Australia and is seen as the most credible source of news.<sup>12</sup> This trust in the platform is complemented by the breadth of SBS's radio offering.

SBS is the world's most linguistically diverse public broadcaster, bringing almost 70 radio language programs and dedicated digital music channels to the 21 per cent of Australians who speak a language other than English (**LOTE**) at home.

<sup>11</sup> <https://www.gizmodo.com.au/2017/08/streaming-services-will-be-more-popular-than-pay-tv-in-less-than-a-year/>

<sup>12</sup> Survey carried out in May 2017, results released in July 2017. "42% of respondents surveyed considered radio trustworthy, with a wide gap to TV (24%), online (18%) and newspapers/magazines (15%). <http://www.gfk.com/en-au/insights/press-release/radio-most-trusted-media-survey-shows/>



As a public broadcaster, SBS is committed to being balanced and impartial. In this role, SBS also has a responsibility to apprise all Australians about the community in which they live. For example, SBS News publishes backgrounders on topical issues to provide context and increase understanding of key issues—such as click farms, ‘how government works’, and the Census. These backgrounders enable all Australians to be informed and to participate in the conversations of the day, in English as well as in their first language.

SBS Radio communicates a diversity of views and perspectives to Australian audiences. While migrants to Australia now have access to homeland news and information via satellite TV and the internet, SBS Radio plays a fundamental role in providing Australian news and information, celebrating audiences’ cultures, and giving migrants a voice within the Australian community—all in the migrants’ first language.

In addition, SBS provides international news coverage through the lens of the community living here in Australia, a perspective which migrants are unable to experience through their homeland sources. SBS broadcasters can access the stories of people ‘on the ground’ no matter where a story breaks in the world—and bring those stories to Australia, where we can also translate them into English to share with all Australians.

SBS Radio programs also provide news and feature content with an Indigenous focus, introducing migrants to Australia’s ATSI culture and communities, building cross-cultural understanding. Three times each week, SBS Radio also presents *NITV Radio* (previously known as *SBS Living Black Radio*) which aims to connect, inform and inspire ATSI communities around the nation through news, current affairs, and community information. Each SBS Radio language program is supported by an online presence, and programs are also available as podcasts so they can be accessed by listeners at a time and on a device of their choice. Podcasting has proven incredibly popular, with more than 1.5 million language programs consumed in this way every month.

The content featured on SBS Radio’s programs is national, and broadcasters are encouraged to broadly represent communities across the country. Language programs that are broadcast everyday have correspondents in most states, as well as internationally, who provide international, regional and state-based reports. While all content for these programs is locally produced and presented, programs have a general guideline of 70 per cent Australian-focused content and 30 per cent international-focused content.

In addition to the many language programs offered across the schedule of our main radio channels, in March 2016, SBS launched SBS Arabic24 for Australia’s Arabic-speaking community—a 24/7 multiplatform service on mobile, online and digital radio. SBS Arabic24 offers Arabic-speaking Australians a balanced and impartial destination focusing on life in Australia and a touchpoint to the rest of the Arabic-speaking world. The service’s Australian-produced content is complemented by a selection of the best programming from SBS partner BBC Arabic, broadcast live from the BBC’s Dubai news centre.





SBS's dedicated music radio stations (SBS Pop Desi, SBS Chill and SBS PopAsia) by their nature, focus on world music. These stations provide access to music not easily available elsewhere, and by providing the audio links (introductions and commentary) in English, encouraging all Australians to explore other cultures through music.

Considering that SBS Radio is nearly exclusively Australian-produced content, with the exception of world music channels, the implementation of a local content quota on SBS Radio is unnecessary.

### **Recommendation**

That Australian content quotas are not implemented on SBS Radio.

### Streaming

SBS On Demand is a growing focus of the SBS content offering. Registered users access quality dramas, documentaries, movies and entertainment programming from around the world, as well as a 'catch-up service' for SBS's broadcast television programming. As at 30 June 2017, SBS On Demand had more than 6,000 hours of programs—including 900 movies, 200 documentaries, and 50 premium drama titles. Seventy-six percent of SBS On Demand's dramas are in languages other than English.

Unique, high quality international content available exclusively on SBS On Demand also provides opportunities to cross-promote the Australian content which is available on the service and share core Australian SBS content with a wider audience. For example, during 2016–17, the second series of *The Family Law*, was subtitled into Chinese (simplified), Korean and Vietnamese.

A number of other titles have recently been subtitled into Chinese and Arabic and made available on SBS On Demand: the second series of *First Contact*; *Is Australia Racist*; and *Date My Race. Undressed* and *The Chefs' Line* were also subtitled into Chinese on the service. This is a unique way to ensure that quality Australian content reaches new audiences, particularly new migrants, who may not speak English.

In 2018, *Homecoming Queens* will be available on SBS On Demand—the streaming platform's first exclusive local commission. The semi-autobiographical dramedy will follow Michelle and Chloe as they reinvent themselves after chronic illness. The original online series will be available as a 60 minute special and 7 x 8 minute episodes.

The implementation of a fully-funded content quota on SBS main channel will also have a flow-on effect to the level of Australian commissioned content on SBS On Demand. As such, quotas are not suitable for an online service, the purpose of which is to make available a large amount of high-quality content from Australia and around the world, and which is not restricted by a set number of broadcast hours per year.



## Recommendation

Australian content quotas are not imposed implemented on SBS streaming services.

### Australian children's television content

#### *National Indigenous Television*

NITV is Australia's national free-to-air home of ATSI storytelling, proudly part of SBS since 2012, and delivering Australia's only national ATSI television news service.<sup>13</sup> The channel aims to inform, educate and entertain its Indigenous and non-Indigenous audiences. Stories, culture, languages, aspirations and development are key components of its content.

Increased support and funding for ATSI controlled media was a recommendation of the Royal Commission into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody (**RCIADIC**) in its final report of 1991.<sup>14</sup>

NITV provides a positive exploration and celebration of historical and contemporary ATSI culture and languages, through drama and documentary; as well as news and current affairs, sport programs and features. NITV is investing more in content than ever before, working closely with and further developing the ATSI production sector across the country.

Improving race relations and providing all Australian children and families with the opportunity to learn about, appreciate and understand ATSI culture and languages, is supported by Reconciliation Australia, in *The State of Reconciliation in Australia* report of 2016.<sup>15</sup>

#### *ATSI children on screen*

Fifty three per cent of the total ATSI population are aged under 25 years old compared to 31% of non-Indigenous people, which means that content specifically designed for children and young people is of particular importance.<sup>16</sup>

NITV is placing increasing focus on broadcasting and publishing content that is specifically designed for children and youth. As noted above, NITV has had recent success with its first animated children's program, *Little J and Big Cuz*. As further noted, the next NITV children's content initiative to air, in February 2018, is *Grace Beside Me*, a

<sup>13</sup> NITV first operated in 2007 as a private company; then, in 2012 merged with SBS.

<sup>14</sup> Recommendation 205 of the Royal Commission into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody (**RCIADIC**) – available at <http://www.austlii.edu.au/au/other/IndigLRes/rciadic/national/vol5/5.html>

<sup>15</sup> Reconciliation Australia, *The State of Reconciliation in Australia*, 2016, page 8, [URL](#)

<sup>16</sup> Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS), [URL](#)





13-part television series which follows the story of Fuzzy Mac, a teenager trying to balance average teenage life with the ATSI realm of culture and spirits.

Providing access for ATSI children to their culture and languages, and children like them on screen—and supporting this content with educational resources—should be a cross-portfolio Government priority.

It is extremely important for ATSI children to see themselves represented on television, radio, digital and social media—to ensure social inclusion and economic participation, and to contribute to early childhood development and a positive sense of identity.

Cultural continuity is a known protective factor for Indigenous young people,<sup>17</sup> with Indigenous-led media well positioned to contribute to cultural preservation and transmission. Further to this, it is well accepted that educational television programs can help improve children's school readiness by building literacy and numeracy skills, self-esteem and healthy behaviours.

The outcomes of this review should privilege ATSI<sup>18</sup> stories and content for the purposes of all Australians, and enable equity of access to digital technology, and culturally appropriate educational materials for ATSI children, families and communities.

#### *Supporting the development of children's content*

The *Report of the Inquiry into the Australian Film and Television Industry* recommended that '... the Australian Government reviews the hours-based quota for first release children's screen content and considers replacing some or all of this quota obligation with a contestable fund to support the creation of quality Australian children's programs into the future.'<sup>19</sup> SBS would also recommend that should a contestable fund be established, it be accessible by public broadcasters, as they continue to focus on developing quality content for Australian children.

#### *Digital access for ATSI children*

The unprecedented rise of social and digital media has happened within the same decade that NITV has been in existence.

The Australian Communications and Media Authority (ACMA) report, *Children's television viewing and multi-screen behaviour*, found that children under the age of 14

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<sup>17</sup> Chandler, M & Lalonde, E, *Cultural Continuity as a Protective Factor against Suicide in First Nations*, 2008 – available at [https://www.researchgate.net/publication/239921354\\_Cultural\\_Continuity\\_as\\_a\\_Protective\\_Factor\\_Against\\_Suicide\\_in\\_First\\_Nations\\_Youth](https://www.researchgate.net/publication/239921354_Cultural_Continuity_as_a_Protective_Factor_Against_Suicide_in_First_Nations_Youth).

<sup>18</sup> Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander (ATSI) is used as the preferred term other than where a title or quote is retained, and when referencing Indigenous peoples in a global context.

<sup>19</sup> [https://www.aph.gov.au/Parliamentary\\_Business/Committees/House/Communications/AustralianfilmandTV/Report](https://www.aph.gov.au/Parliamentary_Business/Committees/House/Communications/AustralianfilmandTV/Report)  
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are using almost three different platforms to watch children's programs, and nearly all children are using multiple devices.<sup>20</sup>

However, recent ABS data has been used longitudinally by the *Centre for Aboriginal Economic Policy Research (CAEPR)* to outline the digital divide that exists between ATSI peoples and non-Indigenous Australians.<sup>21</sup> The analysis determined retention of internet access, along with barriers to access in ATSI communities to information and communications technology (ICT), such as remoteness, income, employment, education and demography are key factors impacting digital accessibility for ATSI children. It is important to highlight this disparity for the purposes of education and connection to society for ATSI children, youth and families, and also that basic enjoyment of media and streaming services is not afforded to all Australians.

Nevertheless, children's programming must be available on streaming services, and apps designed for multiple devices. SBS and NITV's children's programming is available through SBS On Demand across multiple platforms. The continued accessibility by ATSI children to quality Australian content is of great importance, and should be considered together with support for the creation of this content.

#### Recommendations

**Funding for ATSI children's content**, supporting NITV to deliver its strategy of developing entertaining and educational children's and youth content.

That a **contestable fund for the development of children's screen content** be established, accessible by public broadcasters.

That **digital accessibility for ATSI children's content** be considered as a key issue in facilitating audience reach.

<sup>20</sup> Australian Communications and Media Authority (2017), *Children's television viewing and multi-screen behavior* <https://www.acma.gov.au/-/media/Community-Broadcasting-and-Safeguards/Research/PDF/Childrens-television-viewing-and-multi-screen-behaviour-pdf.pdf?la=en>

<sup>21</sup> Radoll, P & Hunter, B, , CAEPR Working Paper 120/2017, ANU, [http://caepr.cass.anu.edu.au/sites/default/files/docs/Working\\_Paper\\_120\\_2017\\_1.pdf](http://caepr.cass.anu.edu.au/sites/default/files/docs/Working_Paper_120_2017_1.pdf)