



# The Australian Association of Voice Actors

Submission to the Senate Inquiry  
On Adopting Artificial Intelligence (AI)

May 2024

## SUBMISSION TO THE SENATE INQUIRY ON ADOPTING ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE (AI)



### THE AUSTRALIAN ASSOCIATION OF VOICE ACTORS

**The Australian Association of Voice Actors (AAVA)** is a not-for-profit association for those who work as Voice Actors, their representatives, and those who facilitate and draw income from the Voice Acting industry in Australia such as casting directors, talent agents and managers, audio engineers, copywriters, microphone manufacturers, and audio production studios.

Voice Actors are the people whose talents become the voice of radio and television commercials, movie trailers, audiobooks, animated characters, podcasts, technical explainer videos, e-learning, news broadcasts, foreign language dubbing, live events, video games, talking toys, interactive phone systems, and audio branding for your favourite radio/TV station or program.

AAVA is a member of **United Voice Artists (UVA)**<sup>1</sup>, a worldwide group of Voice Acting guilds, unions and associations, and we also consult with like-minded bodies in other markets such as our sister organisation **National Association of Voice Artists (NAVA)**<sup>2</sup> in the United States, to share initiatives and cross-market challenges.

AAVA<sup>3</sup> appreciates the opportunity to communicate our concerns and vision for the successful adoption of AI technology in Australia.

## INTRODUCTION

It is our belief that all voiced work relies on human connection and emotion, and should therefore be created with human voices. It is our belief that only humans are able to translate true feelings into words that form deep connections with the audience and listeners. Artificial intelligence (AI) does not understand, nor can it replicate the nuances needed to authentically execute this task.

However, AAVA acknowledges that the development of synthetic voices in combination with AI is unstoppable and therefore needs to be evaluated, guided and properly valued in order to give all involved parties a unified basis of calculation and protection against misuse.

The technical ability to create and use AI and synthetic voices has developed at an ever-increasing pace - while the rights of artists and citizens are often overlooked or outright disregarded. Primarily in Australia, the legal protections for one's image and voice vary from non-existent to limited.

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<sup>1</sup> [United Voice Artists \(UVA\)](#) - Website

<sup>2</sup> [National Association of Voice Artists \(NAVA\)](#) - Website

<sup>3</sup> [Australian Association of Voice Actors \(AAVA\)](#) - Website

## PERSONAL SECURITY

Voice manipulators exist right now, stealing the voices of Australian citizens and the existing work of professional Voice Actors, to create synthetic AI voices for profit and/or deception, as outlined in this article 'AI Voice Scams Are Coming. Here's What You Need To Know'<sup>4</sup> published by Choice (2/2/2024). "AI voice scams appear to be an evolution of the text message-based "Hi Mum" scam which gained notoriety in Australia in 2022."

An investigation by The Guardian 'AI Can Fool Voice Recognition Used To Verify Identity By Centrelink And Australian Tax Office' (17/3/2023)<sup>5</sup>, demonstrated that "using just four minutes of audio, a Guardian Australia journalist was able to generate a clone of their own voice and was then able to use this, combined with their customer reference number, to gain access to their own Centrelink self-service account". A worrying reality for all Australians.

## MARKET DISRUPTION

It is AAVA's firm belief that AI can be of great help and benefit, if used in an ethical way, but without firm legislation in place, ethical use is not assured.

In a worst-case scenario, AI voice technology poses the danger of a complete loss of market value and self-determination over one's own voice. This is especially true for vulnerable peoples; women, children, and people living with disabilities who often work in many of the occupations outlined as "at risk" in this News.com article 'The Jobs Mostly Likely To Be Replaced By Artificial Intelligence Technology In Australia' (29/2/2024)<sup>6</sup>.

Although not specifically referenced in this article, Voice Actors and Voice Over Artists have been gradually losing work to synthetic voices created using AI and Generative AI for at least a decade, and with the technology taking a quantum leap in the last year the rate is increasing immeasurably.

In one recent example (2023), an Australian based online animation series allegedly cloned the voices of the performers it had previously contracted to provide character voices. Allegedly, using AI voice technology, the producers continued to create episodes of its animation using synthetic voices of the same actors with no further payment, no further employment and no credit to the actors that the voices were originally sourced from. Essentially these actors were replaced by digital versions of themselves.

With AI voice-replicating technology already in advanced stages across the globe, no voice is safe from exploitation. With over 5,000 Australians identifying 'Voice Acting' or 'Voice Over' as all or some of their income on Casting Networks<sup>7</sup> (one of the industry's leading casting portals), there are many jobs under threat. And it is not

<sup>4</sup> [AI Voice Scams Are Coming. Here's What You Need To Know](#) - Article Choice (2/2/2024)

<sup>5</sup> [AI Can Fool Voice Recognition Used To Verify Identity By Centrelink And Australian Tax Office](#) - Article The Guardian (17/3/2023)

<sup>6</sup> [The Jobs Mostly Likely To Be Replaced By Artificial Intelligence Technology In Australia](#) - Article News.com (29/2/2024)

<sup>7</sup> <https://www.castingnetworks.com> - Website

only the Voice Actors themselves that are losing work to AI synthetic voice clones. When a Voice Actor is replaced using AI, often two or more support staff (recording studio employees) also lose work.

In an article from The Hollywood Reporter (30/1/2024) 'The Hollywood Jobs Most At Risk From AI'<sup>8</sup> details of a study (FUTURE UNSCRIPTED: The Impact Of Generative AI On Entertainment Industry Jobs)<sup>9</sup> revealed that 25% of respondents indicated that AI tools supported the elimination, reduction, or consolidation of jobs at their companies. "Among the top tasks flagged as likely to be impacted by AI: creating realistic sound design for film, TV, or games; developing 3D assets; and creating realistic sounding foreign-language dubbing. The tasks least likely to be affected include writing film, TV, or game scripts, as well as performing music or vocals".

At present in Australia, we are aware of at least one national radio network that is actively investing in technology to replace human Voice Actors. A disappointing move from a player in an industry that has relied on Voice Artists to bring quality, credibility and, *humanity* to their medium for over 100 years.

## **MORAL RIGHTS & INTELLECTUAL PROPERTY**

Besides labour displacement there are further ethical issues effecting professional Voice Actors and everyday citizens alike – voice theft.

It's an astounding fact: currently in Australia, not one person holds any ownership over their voice. Australians have no legal protection to stop their voice being cloned using Artificial Intelligence, without their consent.

Voice Actors are artists, their voices are their livelihoods. They invest years honing their craft, building their unique vocal identities and establishing themselves in the industry. The emergence of AI technology threatens to undermine their work by enabling the creation of synthetic clones of their voices, without their consent. Disreputable companies are right now stealing current Voice Actor work and feeding it into AI machine learning to breathe life into a clone of the human artist. This not only jeopardises the economic interests of Voice Actors but raises profound ethical concerns regarding the unauthorised use of their likeness. A Voice Actor's sound, their timber, their tone is to them like a line of code is to Microsoft - it is their property... or should be.

Furthermore, legislation is necessary to protect the general public from the potential risks of unauthorised synthetic AI clones of voices. Without proper regulation individuals could manipulate synthetic voices for malicious purposes, such as spreading electoral misinformation, committing fraud, using it for coercive control or perpetrating identity theft.

Some regions around the world are looking at ways to mitigate any emerging risks of technologies such as AI via voluntary approaches and agreed codes-of-conduct. In fact, AAVA is attempting this right now via its "fAIr Go For Voices Pledge", a basic

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<sup>8</sup> [The Hollywood Jobs Most At Risk From AI](#) – Article, The Hollywood Reporter (30/1/2024)

<sup>9</sup> [FUTURE UNSCRIPTED: The Impact Of Generative AI On Entertainment Industry Jobs](#) - Study CVL ECONOMICS (January 2024)

set of principles we are urging organisations to adhere to until there are legislative protections in place. However, when profit is placed at a higher priority than humans, shareholder dividends easily encourage corporations to opt out of something that is merely voluntary, as social media companies have displayed in recent years.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

To protect Voice Actors and the general public from unethical use of AI technology, to exploit their vocal likeness by creating synthetic digital clones, or digital doubles of their voice, basic legislative protections are urgently needed.

### CONSENT

After a recent YouTube animation allegedly used artificially generated voice-overs from pre-recorded material submitted by Australian Voice Actors, their agents and the MEAA were powerless to do anything about it. Why? Because, technically, there is no law against it. This is just one example of voice theft that is happening at a growing rate around the globe.

*It should be illegal to create a synthetic clone of an Australian citizen's voice without informed and explicit consent. Assumed agreement should never be accepted.*

### CONTROL

At present, there are “off the shelf” AI voice products available to content producers. Even when Voice Actors have agreed to the platform creating a synthetic clone or AI replica of their voice, the Artist has no control or say in how their voice is used. Content that is misaligned with the Voice Actor’s moral, religious or ethical views could still be presented in their own voice.

It’s also vital that the data sets created from a human voice be kept securely to protect the digital clone from being accessed and used by unauthorised third parties.

*Any person who consents to their voice being cloned using AI technology (with an AI developer such as Eleven Labs, or Replica etc.) should be able to, if they so wish, have control over how, by whom, where, and what content their voice is used for. Carte blanche use of the voice should never be assumed. The terms of a contract should not be changed, nor can a contract be upsold for profit or on-sold to another entity.*

### COMPENSATION

As AI voice cloning technology has become more convincing and “life-like”, its impact on an actor’s ability to earn also becomes inevitable. Not only does it impact other Voice Actors who lose out to an AI synthetic voice, but they even find they are competing with themselves! These factors impact a Voice Actor’s ability to earn future income.

*A Voice Actor should be fairly compensated for the potential loss of future work when creating a digital clone of their own voice. Consent to use their “voice double” should be able to be revoked if a mutually agreeable level of compensation cannot be found.*

## **LABELLING**

One of the key risks with AI technology in the realms of content creation is the issue of trust and authenticity. Recently, this has played out in the areas of political messaging (Joe Biden deep fakes), and advertising and PR (Royal Family Photoshop controversy). The technology of AI audio and video is now at the point where the general public cannot be certain if an image or audio grab is authentically human.

*Content created using synthetic clones of someone’s voice should be labelled as such using an audible disclaimer, such as “The following audio contains artificially generated synthetic voices”. This will give the general public ample opportunity to scrutinise what they are hearing with full knowledge. AI-created audio content should also have a built-in digital watermark, like a commercial advertising key number, which leads back to its creator.*

## **TRANSPARENCY OF SOURCE**

Knowing if a synthetic voice-clone has been legally and ethically created is impossible right now. Was the source voice “stolen”? Is the source voice a deceased person?

*Only platforms that track, and make available, information regarding which source voice/voices they have used to train their specific AI Voice, should be allowed to operate in Australia. Only platforms that supply AI-created audio content with a built-in digital watermark to track usage should be allowed to operate in Australia.*

## **DURATION OF LIFE OF DIGITAL CLONE**

In the past, Voice Actors have been pressured into signing away their vocal likeness “in perpetuity” and this trend continues to grow. Some actors experiencing hardship have been tempted into these agreements, but when an actor’s financial situation changes, this could be a regrettable decision made out of desperation. Large AI companies will seek to exploit these situations where they can.

Giving away your vocal likeness in perpetuity (forever) is not an offer that should ever be considered, or even an option. No human should have their unique voice or likeness controlled by anyone indefinitely, in what could resemble a form of digital slavery.

*Markets and AI technology can, and do, change rapidly. A legislated maximum term for vocal likeness licensing contracts should be implemented. Each agreement must have an end date and a maximum term should exist as a default, by law.*

*It should be strictly illegal for a human voice to be cloned beyond the natural life of the human who provided the source voice. Use of a voice beyond the natural life of the provider creates a closed-door marketplace for emerging Voice Actors and a gradual deletion of any need for real-life Voice Actors.*

*One exception may be when an existing contract for licensing is still active. In this case, payment is made to the estate of the actor, but use of, and data relating to, such Voice Actors must be deleted upon the end of the contract.*

## **PROTECTION FOR VULNERABLE PEOPLES & CULTURES**

Women, children, cultural minorities and people living with disabilities are always more heavily impacted by labour displacement and coercive control.

At present, protections for cultural minorities must be a consideration, especially when it comes to Australia's unique and treasured Indigenous peoples and cultural minorities. Non-indigenous people having unregulated access to create and use synthetic clones of First Nations voices is an outcome that must be avoided at all costs.

*The recommendations of CONSENT, CONTROL, COMPENSATION, DURATION and LABELLING were originally considered to protect Voice Actors; however, these legal guardrails will work to protect ALL AUSTRALIANS from exploitation, including at-risk groups such as Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders, women, children, and people living with disabilities.*

## **CONCLUSION**

The advent of artificial intelligence (AI) technology has brought about numerous advancements, including the ability to create synthetic voices that mimic human speech with unprecedented accuracy. While this technology holds immense potential for various applications, it also poses significant ethical and legal challenges, particularly concerning the unauthorised creation of synthetic AI clones of Voice Actors.

AAVA argues that there is an absolute necessity for legislation to protect both Voice Actors and the general public from the potential harms associated with the proliferation of unauthorised synthetic AI clones of voices. Legislation such as this paves the way for Artists' Unions such as MEAA (Australia) and SAG/AFTRA (USA) to implement collective licensing agreements, where Voice Actors collectively negotiate with developers and users of synthetic voice technology to achieve an agreed contract.

If we allow developers of AI to continue completely unfettered, the Voice Actor industry will spiral out of control, eventually operating at the hands of a few IT companies. Greater still, the consequences for every Australian who uses their voice could be catastrophic.

Please contact the executive members of the Australian Association of Voice Actors Committee for further information and collaboration.

Simon Kennedy – President



Teresa Lim – Vice President



Gail Knight – Secretary



Jacqui Duncan – Treasurer



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