

Submission prepared by

## WIDE ANGLE TASMANIA



To be referred to:

## The Environment and Communications References Committee

Prepared by:

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Authorised by:

Graham Gates  
Chair, Board of Wide Angle Tasmania

### **Who we are**

Wide Angle Tasmania (WAT) is a not-for-profit organisation run by a board of directors and staffed by a general manager and part-time administrative staff. We are funded principally by Screen Australia and Screen Tasmania. Established in 2004, we are a member-based organisation, representing around 800 registered members comprising screen and multi-media students and emerging practitioners, and related service providers.

### **What we do**

Wide Angle Tasmania works to create a vibrant screen culture in Tasmania, nurturing local talent. Headquartered in Salamanca, the heart of Hobart's art precinct, we provide support, training and access to equipment and production initiatives to our members statewide. Our main areas of operation include:

- Mentoring by experienced screen and all-media practitioners
- Workshops, master-classes and industry courses
- Networking opportunities
- Film production equipment hire
- Free screenings of local, national and international content
- Sponsorship of Tasmanian public film festivals
- Access to a library of over 350 films
- Production support through industry collaboration

### **Discussion**

In response to the enquiry into the decision by the television management of the Australian Broadcasting Corporation (ABC) to significantly cut the number and amount of ABC-produced programs and jobs, we offer comment specifically on the first three terms of reference:

(a) The implications of this decision on the ABC's ability to create produce and own its television content, particularly in the capital cities of Brisbane, Adelaide, Perth and Hobart;

(b) The implications of this decision on Australian film and television production in general and potential impact on quality and diversity of programs;

(c) whether a reduction in ABC-produced programs is contrary to the aims of the National Regional Program Initiative;

#### **Point (a) – create, produce, own**

*NB: In relation to (a) we will confine our discussion to the capital city of Hobart.*

- 1) The ABC currently owns infrastructure in Tasmania that, as a result of "resting" selective productions such as *The Collectors*, has resulted in the downgrading of assets, directly impacting on the ABC's ability to create and produce its own content in Tasmania.
- 2) WAT regularly utilises the experience and skills of current and former ABC staff as tutors and trainers. It is a symbiotic relationship resulting in new and emerging practitioners up-skilling sufficiently to be considered for employment in locally produced ABC programs. Any reduction in production activity will immediately impact on training and employment opportunities for local practitioners, adversely affecting the ABC's ability to create, produce and own the regional voice of television content.

**Point (b) – quality and diversity**

Australia is without question one of the most culturally diverse nations in the world. Not only do we celebrate international diversity – we also embrace the quixotic nature of our own regional culture.

Quality and diversity is not always popular – which is why independent programming is a vital tool in ensuring ALL areas of culture, lifestyle and opinion are represented. There is no doubt that competition for the screen-funding dollar is tough but somewhat augmented by the opportunity to express diversity through independent sector. Tasmania feels this very keenly given the geographical location and micro communities. There is no doubt at all that the loss of locally created, produced and owned content through ABC will result in the precious diversity of regional and rural locations being lost to the more compelling mass market.

**Point (c) – contrary to the NRP initiative**

It is reasonable to comment that the vision and aims of the NRP initiative can be summarised into two broad objectives:

- 1) To encourage strategic alliances between whole of government and their regional communities to better enhance beneficial community outcomes, and,
- 2) To boost regional development, unleashing economic potential at local and regional levels.

At WAT, we firmly believe that any reduction in ABC production in Tasmania will impact immediately on employment opportunities, on-the-job training and consequential work placement – all for which is highly counter-productive to NRP objectives.

Short film, documentary and corporate productions all use staff who have worked and been trained by ABC at some stage of their careers. Losing training opportunities and experienced technical crew will also adversely impact on the independent production sector, forcing them offshore, which is also highly counterproductive to boosting communities and development at a regional level.

**In conclusion**

Tasmania already suffers from a lack of connectivity to its own state and federal governments due to its highly fragmented regional nature and the tyranny of distance. In relation to the screen industry, we are chronically underrepresented in both screen-funding dollars in our own state, compared to other state and territories, and by applications to the national screen funding body. Losing production activity of any description will further disadvantage our own screen industry opportunities and severely impact on the cultural and economic stability of the Tasmanian screen industry.

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