



AUSTRALIAN CHILDREN'S TELEVISION FOUNDATION

SUBMISSION TO SCREEN AUSTRALIA IN RELATION TO ITS DRAFT PROGRAM GUIDELINES

'Distinctively Australian' children's productions

The ACTF reiterates its previous statements made in respect of the Distinctively Australian funding scheme.

As it currently operates, this funding stream is not delivering on its objective: supporting children's programs which are so intrinsically Australian, they may not have an international market.

In a number of instances, this funding stream has been treated as a relatively quick way of financing children's programs that should otherwise fall under the general children's funding stream. It is 'quick', because the producer does not need to seek additional finance in the form of an international presale or distribution advance.

The trade-off is that the producer must make the series under the Distinctively Australian production budget cap. The draft program guidelines also seem to anticipate a lower level of development for these types of shows. For example, projects under the normal funding scheme require three scripts to be signed off by the broadcaster, but this is not a requirement for the Distinctively Australian stream.

With one or two notable exceptions (for example, *Double Trouble*), the scheme is financing cheap, less developed versions of programs that could have otherwise been financed under the general children's funding scheme.

The ACTF recommends incorporating the funding currently reserved for Distinctively Australian production into the general children's funding scheme.

To ensure that distinctively Australian series can continue to be produced, Screen Australia should have the discretion that projects which meet a high 'cultural bar' not require the same level of international presales, if any, as for other children's projects.

While this introduces a degree of subjectivity into the decision making process, it is unavoidable if the agency wishes to support intrinsically Australian children's stories. It is worth remembering that the priority for the agency should always be the potential value of a proposed project to the local child audience. That is the reason that taxpayer funds are provided to children's programs.

In essence, the test Screen Australia needs to adopt in relation to children's productions is whether a particular project:

- has a local presale at the standard minimum licence fee; and

- has an international presale or presales at market rates; or
- if it lacks the international presales, the relevant factors indicate that the series may be of such cultural benefit to the local child audience that it deserves Screen Australia support,

and it otherwise meets Screen Australia's funding requirements, including funding caps, and appropriate level of development.

Funding rounds

Under the current guidelines, the children's television drama production funding rounds will be in August and December, with the Distinctively Australian round to be "considered in October".

This only leaves a short window of opportunity for children's funding, and has the potential to place producers in a difficult situation juggling the broadcast schedule interests of both local and international potential pre-sale licensees.

A broader funding window of at least that contained in the current guidelines should be retained.

Expanding the type programs that deserve Government support

There has been some suggestion by practitioners that Screen Australia should open up its funding to P (preschool) programming, rather than just C drama (children's drama).

The ACTF would oppose any suggestion that Screen Australia subsidise the broadcasters' cost of producing cheap P programming.

On the other hand, it is open to the possibility of providing funding for high budget P programming (including animation, live action drama and high end educational programming), provided that the broadcaster participating paid a licence fee at or above an appropriate minimum amount.

However, the fact remains that Screen Australia does not currently have funds for this additional investment, and does not appear likely to receive them in the near future. The amount of funding currently internally allocated for financing C drama programs is appropriate for that type of programming and should not be reallocated to preschool programming.

A push to broaden of the scope of programs which can receive Screen Australia investment needs to be accompanied by a corresponding increase in funding for the agency.

ACTF
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