



Hearts & Minds

How local screen stories capture
the hearts & minds of Australians

A qualitative study by The Mind & Mood Report for Screen Australia



THE
MIND & MOOD
REPORT

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This report was produced for Screen Australia by Ipsos Australia, Sydney.

Front cover image: *Puberty Blues*

Introduction

Hearts & Minds explores how and why Australians engage with local screen stories on both television and film.

What is the role of local content in the screen diets of Australian viewers?

And more broadly, what is its cultural value?

What role does it play in the formulation of national identity?

How does it build towards a sense of belonging and participation?

These questions and more were put to friendship groups of everyday Australians, who graciously opened their 'hearts & minds' to researchers and shared their thoughts, feelings and experience of local screen stories.

They talked passionately about stories that had stayed with them. They reflected on what drove them to engage with local content and what they expected from it. They pondered the barriers they faced in accessing local stories, particularly at the cinema. They debated if and how local content reflected them and how it contributed to their own sense of national identity.

Participants in the research had lots to say about screen stories – about their appreciation of the 'down-to-earth' nature of Australian film, the educative role of local screen stories (particularly in relation to Indigenous Australia) and the ability of the industry to 'do a little with a lot', making impressive films on small budgets. There was a strong belief that screen stories are now more sophisticated and diverse, reflecting a more complex Australia. The enthusiasm for thought provoking TV dramas such as *The Slap* and *Redfern Now* and films such as *The Sapphires* was evidence of this.

Local content, it was clear, was well and truly on their minds as well as in their hearts.

1 We value our screen stories

1.1 We can relate

Participants enjoyed the sense of 'home' and familiarity they experienced when watching Australian screen stories full of characters, humour, locations and a way of life they recognised and could relate to.

1.2 We can learn

Local screen content played an important educative role especially when it came to stories about Indigenous Australians.

1.3 Who else will tell these stories?

There was a strong belief that Australian filmmakers excelled at a 'down-to-earth' and nuanced style of storytelling, thought to be perfect for the 'smaller' stories they told about contemporary, multicultural Australian life and Indigenous Australians.

1.4 We can do a lot with a little

Participants were proud of what Australian filmmakers had achieved with relatively small budgets and didn't expect them to produce blockbusters.

1.5 There's a time and place for everything

Light entertainment and reality TV had its place in the diets of viewers, usually dictated by mood or what time of day they were watching.

1.6 Our stories are more diverse and sophisticated... because we are

Many believed that Australian film and television had matured over the last 10 to 20 years, moving well past cliché stories and stereotypes to better reflect our more sophisticated and culturally diverse society.

1.7 TV is essential to us finding screen stories

When it came to how Australians consumed local screen stories, television emerged as the dominant platform.

1.1 We can relate

Although participants sought out local content for a range of reasons, at the top of their list was their desire for interesting stories they could relate to. Participants enjoyed the sense of 'home' and familiarity they experienced when watching Australian screen stories full of characters, humour, locations and a way of life they recognised and could connect with.

The 'down-to-earth' nature of local screen content was also discussed as a drawcard for audiences.

Most of them [screen stories] are quite realistic; you can relate to a lot of everyday things. Whereas I guess in American or English [content] you don't necessarily relate to it. You don't know how much is fiction. I think the story lines in – whether it be *Neighbours* or the other shows – are realistic most of the time. **(Man 40s)**

A lot of the Australian films I've seen seem to be down-to-earth and realistic. It's real life. It's the drama of your life. **(Man 40s)**

The obvious comparisons were made between Australian screen stories and the type of content that comes out of Hollywood. Participants felt that American screen content, both film and TV, was deliberately 'over the top', jam-packed with action, special effects and high drama, whereas local content was more likely to be grounded in reality.

Americans go over the top to get the audience. They put the excitement in there... People want to watch that. They want the Rambo's and the Steven Seagals and all this sort of stuff. There's more action than what really takes place in reality. **(Man 60s)**

The majority of movies and sitcoms these days are American and they are so fake. They have twists to them and all of that but the Australian movies just come across as real. They're very real. **(Woman 30s)**

Australian filmmakers were discussed as taking a more 'honest' approach to their craft than their American counterparts and were described as being particularly good at exploring the subtleties of characters.

What sets Australian films apart is their capacity to convey feelings and characters in a subtle way. Things that American films simply can't do well. **(Woman 50s)**

It's the honesty. The way they film it. It's not as slick. **(Woman 50s)**

Stories that captured the Australian way of life were discussed as being particularly easy to relate to, be they drama/comedy on commercial TV or iconic Australian films.

Man 60s 1: *Packed to the Rafters* is as close as you are going to get. That's as close to Australian life.

Man 60s 2: Yeah, it's straight up and down, that's how we talk.

Woman 30s 1: I still quote *The Castle*. It was iconic. I do actually relate to it. I know so many people who go and have holidays out at disgusting dams in tiny little towns. That's their idea of peace and quiet.

Woman 30s 2: Yeah, those absolutely quintessential Australian elements. Like the Trading Post. Who is going to have that [in an overseas film]?

Many shared their love of seeing a uniquely Australian self-deprecating brand of humour in local screen stories.

Man 60s 1: [We're] good at taking ourselves off [on screen]. We understand the way we live. Our lifestyle. Australians are a bit different.

Man 60s 2: Australians compared to Americans, they are just totally different. They don't get us at all. They haven't got a bloody clue. I'll take Australian comedy any day.

We've always been good at laughing at ourselves. **(Woman 30s)**

We have more of a humour where we can insult each other and laugh it off. Whereas in America I think they probably shoot each other. **(Woman late teens)**

Interestingly, however, some felt that the tendency to mock ourselves on screen could sometimes go too far.

Man 60s 1: Oh *Kath and Kim*, they are brilliant.

Man 60s 2: I think they had their good times but I think the bad ones outweighed them. They just took the mickey out of Australians and made Australians look like we were all yobbos.

Man 60s 3: Yeah, but I like that.

Man 60s 1: But we are good at doing that. We are good at having a laugh.

Man 60s 2: I'm not disagreeing with that. I just thought that some of the time, the way they carried on, was just a little bit over the top. We are not that dumb or stupid.

Location emerged as a strong element attracting viewers. They enjoyed seeing 'places we know' on screen, which helped them forge a more intimate connection to content.

Man 60s 1: My wife, she said she wanted to go and see *Australia* so I said I would go with her to have a look. I thought it was a good show... I like a lot of Australian bush.

Man 60s 2: Yeah, I've been to Western Australia and that place, Kununurra, was the best thing about *Australia*, especially the river where they made it. I've been to that river. Camped right beside it.

We have been to the cities where they have been filmed. Or the outback where they have been filmed and you can relate to those places. **(Woman 30s)**

Films and TV series based on true Australian crime figures, such as *Chopper* and *Underbelly*, as well as locally made reality/documentary series about high profile crimes, such as Foxtel's *Crime Scene Investigation Australia*, were also a popular topic of discussion in groups. Stories based on real events enabled viewers to relate to content more strongly than with films and shows that were purely fictional.

Underbelly is always good. I think that's more interesting because you kind of know it's true.

(Woman late teens)

I like true life things, documentary stuff, better than fiction. Shows about crimes in Australia, like *CSA (Crime Scene Investigation Australia)*. The one [episode] that freaked me out entirely was the woman who skinned her husband. She was an abattoir worker in Aberdeen. This is actually what goes on around us. It's reality. Reality television in its purest sense. **(Woman 30s)**

But stories based on real crimes and criminal figures weren't the only ones attracting audiences. Participants were enthusiastic about content based on all sorts of true-life events, including obscure or forgotten stories such as that portrayed in *The Sapphires*.

Woman late teens 1: [The acting] in *The Sapphires*, I think it was just perfect and you felt like you were there.

Woman late teens 2: Basically because it was based on real events as well.

Woman late teens 1: I remember in the film when he gets shot, I wanted to cry. Because I was just like, 'what!' You felt like you were there, you felt so into it and it was so interesting. You wouldn't have known that it actually happened [without seeing the film].

Kath & Kimderella



1.2 We can learn

One of the most interesting insights to emerge from this study was just how strong an educative role local screen content played in the lives of participants. The ‘teaching’ aspect of Australian screen stories was highly valued, particularly when it came to stories about Indigenous Australia. Participants discussed how films like *Rabbit Proof Fence* opened their eyes to parts of Australia’s history that are not well understood.

Phillip Noyce’s 2002 portrayal of the stolen generation was the most widely (spontaneously) discussed film of the entire study, with participants of both genders and across all age groups sharing how revelatory, thought provoking and even transformative they found it.

Rabbit Proof Fence was heartbreaking. But I think some stuff is so eye-opening we should be forced to watch it. **(Woman 30s)**

Woman late teens 1: You empathise with them. We learnt about [the stolen generation at school] but we never actually learned about it in depth, what happened to them. Like how vulnerable they were to things like sexual abuse and all that kind of stuff.

Woman late teens 2: And you kind of see how this is why some of them have been so traumatised. What if that happened to you? You would be the same way. It’s just sad but it’s really confronting. I think we need that.

Woman late teens 3: In school, it’s just ‘you have to learn about this, get it in your head’. Whereas you watch the movie you’re actually like, you think about it and you empathise.

Woman late teens 2: At school they just tell you what happened and *Rabbit Proof Fence* shows you.

I thought *Rabbit Proof Fence* was more genuine Australian than anything that I’ve watched. I think the way they have done it is pretty close to exactly what happened. You think, ‘Jesus, were we that bad?’ And I think we were. I don’t think there was any need [for taking the children away]. I reckon it is important to see that film. **(Man 60s)**

The SBS documentary series *First Australians* was also discussed as confronting but compulsory viewing.

First Australians... it’s the story of how Aboriginals have been treated. It’s horrific. And I think every single child should watch that in school. It introduced the history of Australia that we never learnt in school. I didn’t know anything about it. I think that’s horrific that we live here and yet we know absolutely nothing. There is no Australian history taught in schools like that. **(Woman 30s)**

Less confronting films such as *Bran Nue Dae* and the 1955 classic *Jedda* were also discussed as memorable stories about Indigenous Australians.

Jedda, it’s a top story. Chips Rafferty. Yeah, showed me a part of [Australia] I’d never seen. Especially being a kid when I saw it. It showed the lifestyle of Australia up there in the Top End, which is completely different. *Jedda* just captured me. **(Man 60s)**

Woman late teens 1: I loved *Brand Nue Day*.

Woman late teens 2: I watched that about five times.

Woman late teens 1: Just the humour, it’s just too funny to watch.

Woman late teens 2: Interesting as well, you get a better understanding of the Aboriginal people.

Woman late teens 1: And you see how they treat each other too. I think that’s what’s funny. Because they sometimes pay each other out.

Woman late teens 2: And the songs are so catchy.

The recent ABC series *Redfern Now* was discussed as a rare window into the lives of urban, contemporary Indigenous Australians and the complex issues they face.

Woman late teens 1: *Redfern Now* gives you a perspective of modern day situations. So rather than what happened back then you look at the effects now.

Woman late teens 2: It did show us some better sides to the community. And they still were a community.

Woman late teens 3: I felt like they have everyday lives like us. You see the first episode where the sister is addicted to drugs. She just wants to be a mum. You don't want to judge her and you don't want to call her a junkie. You just want to help her. But then the other sister has the perfect family.

Woman late teens 1: What it helps us realise is that they're actually trying to help themselves. Because sometimes people have a biased view, you know the stereotypes, 'oh they're from Redfern, probably got no job'. But *Redfern Now* shows us they're now trying to help themselves.



Rabbit Proof Fence

While discussion about the educative role of Australian content focused heavily on stories about Indigenous Australians, it was not limited to that sphere. *East West 101* was also raised as an interesting and attitude-changing window into the lives of urban Australian Muslims.

East West 101, it was fantastic. It wasn't your average boring police show. It was truly multicultural. It was so much more. **(Woman 50s)**

[We don't see much] on an Arab Islamic culture, which is quite different. So it was interesting. For a time I was working out near Auburn and I just feel like I've become a lot more tolerant perhaps from having seen that kind of show. **(Man 40s)**

Other participants cited *Go Back to Where You Came From* as a powerful eye-opener to the experience of asylum seekers.

Woman late teens 1: It's a very good show.

Woman late teens 2: Yeah it's good. Because you have the same experience [as the people on the show].

Woman late teens 3: It just shows you what asylum seekers go through and the conditions they are put in that makes them want to leave and risk their lives.

Woman late teens 4: But some of the people in the show didn't learn much. They felt sorry for the people at the time but they still say 'it's no excuse.'

Woman late teens 1: Yeah, it's a really difficult issue.

Underbelly was another popular topic of discussion in groups of both genders, across all age groups (see Part 2 on types of content for more). For example, *Underbelly* was seen by the teenage group of women in Sydney as a sobering lesson on the reality of police corruption.

You see things differently. Like everyone knows The Cross is bad and everything but you see how the police were corrupt and you think, is this still going on in our society where the police are still corrupt and things like that are still happening? (**Woman late teens**)

1.3 Who else can tell these stories?

When asked to reflect on how they felt about Australian screen stories, participants naturally made comparisons with Hollywood content. As discussed in Part 1.1, **We Can Relate**, Australian filmmakers were perceived as excelling in a more 'real', 'down-to-earth', subtler and more nuanced style of storytelling. This was seen as a positive, as many recognised that the 'smaller' stories they (typically) told, particularly those about contemporary, multicultural Australian life such as *The Slap* and those about Indigenous Australia mentioned above, just wouldn't be made anywhere else. As these participants reflected:

I loved *The Slap*. Imagine trying to do that in America – it just wouldn't work. (**Woman, 50s**)

The Slap didn't try and gloss over it. That was very Australian. That was very warts and all. (**Woman 30s**)

They're smaller films. Not as slick. A little bit more individual, a little bit more quirky. (**Woman 50s**)

While Australian content only formed one part of their screen diets, many participants firmly believed that a strong local film and television industry that produced good quality content was essential to their sense of culture and identity.

There is a place for them [local shows and films] absolutely. They are part of our cultural identity and yeah, they tell history. (**Man 40s**)

Countering the endless stream of American film and TV was seen as a key role of local screen content.

Woman late teens 1: Because you see too much of American stuff you forget about our own people and our own culture. Like forget about how people act, the humour. We start to think we are like Americans now. We get so influenced by them.

Woman late teens 2: It makes us remember that we are not American.

Woman late teens 3: Everybody has so many American influences, not just TV, like music. I don't even listen to Australian music. We have already got enough American music. It's important that we keep our Australian TV shows.

There is enough drama on TV coming from America, we don't need more. (**Woman late teens**)



The Slap

Photo credit Lisa Tomasetti

Interestingly, not all participants felt that their lives and experiences were reflected in Australian screen stories. Migrant participants (first and second generation) felt that mainstream content often did not reflect the multicultural reality of urban life.

One of the things we love about [living in] Australia is the diversity. We should see more of that in commercial shows. **(Man 20s)**

One of the reasons we watch *The Big Bang Theory* is because it shows ethnic diversity as normal. **(Man 20s)**

Woman late teens 1: They're all just blond Aussie surfers on *Home and Away*.

Woman late teens 2: If they do have someone who is obviously foreign they're either like homeless or adopted.

Woman late teens 3: That is so true!

Some migrant participants also found the 'Aussie' cultural and social norms portrayed in commercial content difficult to relate to.

When they make Australian films they always show Australians as laid back, having a barbeque, doing nothing. But it's not like that for us. We don't relate to it. They don't involve people from other countries. **(Man 20s)**

Packed to the Rafters is all white Anglo stuff. It's not my life. **(Man 20s)**



Photo credit Ben King

When it came to accurately reflecting ethnic diversity, reality TV was the clear winner.

Shows like *My Kitchen Rules* and *Masterchef*, you can relate to it because they've got people like you in it. **(Man 20s)**

My Kitchen Rules brings in a lot of different cultures and it gives them a chance to show their different cultures through their food. **(Man 40s)**

1.4 We can do a lot with a little

As discussed in Part 1.3, **Who else can tell these stories?**, participants often spoke favourably about the quieter, less tricked-up style of filmmaking that Australians were known for. They were well aware of the fact that local budgets were just a fraction of what Hollywood filmmakers worked with and therefore didn't expect Australian filmmakers to produce 'blockbusters.'

Australians do not do big, popular blockbusters. **(Woman 50s)**

Many exhibited a strong sense of pride over what Australian filmmakers could achieve with small budgets. They were also proud of the growing list of Australian actors finding success in Hollywood and respected those who came back to Australia periodically to make local films.

Man 40s 1: It's amazing how many Australians have made it in America big time.

Man 40s 2: We're getting there. And then they still want to come back here to make movies.

1.5 There's a time and place for everything

While much of the discussion in groups was centred around film and quality TV drama and documentary, popular 'light' entertainment and reality TV shows were also mentioned. Generally this kind of content was discussed as the kind of thing participants watched when they just wanted to 'veg out', relax and be entertained.

Time slot played a crucial role here, with participants more likely to seek out easy viewing such as *Home and Away*, *Border Security* and *My Kitchen Rules* during the week as a wind-down from the workday.

I love *Home and Away*. That's my seven o'clock show. It's relaxation time, it's easy watching. I can be in and out of the kitchen cooking dinner. Doesn't matter what you miss. Honestly, if you miss 10 minutes you catch it up in the last 10 minutes. You always know what happens. **(Woman 30s)**

I'll sit and watch it [TV] as an entertainment thing. I'll sit down if I have an hour to spare and flick through and find something that will be remotely entertaining and not too taxing. So that's why I will generally steer clear of *Four Corners* and that sort of stuff. **(Woman 30s)**

I don't care if it is quality or not, it's like... what interests me and what I find relaxing. **(Woman 50s)**

Format also played a role, with some watching entire (local) TV series on DVD over a few days.

If I have lots of spare time I go and borrow a TV series from the DVD store and I watch the whole series. **(Woman 30s)**

1.6 Our stories are more diverse and sophisticated... because we are

Participants discussed how Australian film and television had matured and ‘come of age’. They talked of how our screen stories had moved well past relying heavily on clichés and stereotypes, the days when shows like *Kingswood Country* dominated our TV screens and *Crocodile Dundee* constituted ‘Australian’ cinema.

Now, participants believed, local screen stories reflect ‘us’ better – culturally and socially diverse, complex and sophisticated.

Australians used to be portrayed so badly and that’s different now. We’re more cultured and more diverse and that’s reflected in film and television. **(Woman 50s)**

As a society we’re a lot more interesting and diverse now and you see that in film. **(Man 20s)**

There’s a much bigger range, much more diversity now. **(Woman 50s)**

Some saw this new sophistication as a result of growing cultural confidence.

I don’t think Australians used to have an identity or sense of self-worth and that’s why we gravitated to American films. But that’s changing. **(Woman 50s)**

Australian films don’t have the big movie stars but I don’t think that matters much anymore. Now we’re not so image-conscious. It’s the stories not the actors that are important. We’ve matured now. **(Woman 50s)**

In the past it was larrikin humour. Now we’re doing things in more depth with a quiet confidence. It’s much broader now. **(Woman 50s)**

But while many participants were pleased that Australian screen stories had ‘come of age’, they still held a special place in their hearts for stereotype-heavy yet iconic films such as *Crocodile Dundee* and *Muriel’s Wedding*.

I’ve watched *Crocodile Dundee* several times and I thoroughly enjoy it. It’s full of shit but it’s fun. When he pulls that knife out, ‘mate, this is not a knife. This is a knife!’ and the other one says, ‘goddam, that is a knife!’ **(Man 60s)**

Man 40s 1: *Priscilla, Muriel’s Wedding, Strictly Ballroom*... we do watch them over and over again.

Man 40s 2: And when you have daughters that love [films like *Muriel’s Wedding*] it’s easy to watch them again.

1.7 TV is essential to us finding screen stories

When it came to how Australians consumed local screen stories, television emerged as the dominant platform, either via free-to-air or DVD.

My dad rents a lot of movies [on DVD]. He’ll bring them home. I’ll be like, ‘what’s that?’ ‘Oh it’s a really good movie.’ And then I’ll watch it. **(Woman late teens)**

I’m a stay-at-home mum that doesn’t go out so a lot of my entertainment is definitely television and DVDs. **(Woman 30s)**

I’ve never actually watched one [Australian film] in the cinema. **(Woman late teens)**



Participants were more likely to make the trip to the cinema for 'big' (usually Hollywood) films that they'd heard about through friends or in the media, believing the recommendation provided them with a kind of guarantee that the film would be worth the cost of the ticket and the effort of going out.

If you hear about [a film] from people... we have friends that go to the movies a lot of the time and say, 'you had better go and see this; it's a good show'. It's got to be good for me to go to the cinema. **(Man 60s)**

That's how it would start for me... a friend, colleague would say, 'yeah it's good, go and see it'. Then you might look at a review online. **(Man 40s)**

Some Australian films, however, were considered worth the trip to the movies, with high profile, heavily marketed flicks *Australia*, *Red Dog* and *The Sapphires* cited the most.

The Sapphires [I saw] at the cinema. Had good reviews and the story relating to the Vietnam War, you knew that those things really happened... the girls went over and entertained. Yeah, it was a good, 'feel good' movie. **(Woman late teens)**

There was a view that often Australian films were easy to miss at the cinema because of very short runs.

Woman 50s 1: The latest two Australian movies that came out were taken off [the cinema] after two weeks.

Woman 50s 2: Which ones were they?

Woman 50s 1: Steven Curry is in it. The cricket team that went to India. And *Blinder* only lasted a week.

There was also discussion about missing out on seeing Australian films at the cinema because participants didn't hear about them early enough.

Woman 50s 1: Australian movies tend to be niche, not mainstream. So we don't always hear about them.

Woman 50s 2: You hear about them if you're going a lot to the movies and seeing Australian films, but if you don't you quickly fall out of the loop.

Samson and Delilah was a great movie but you don't hear about them [while in cinema release]. **(Man 20s)**

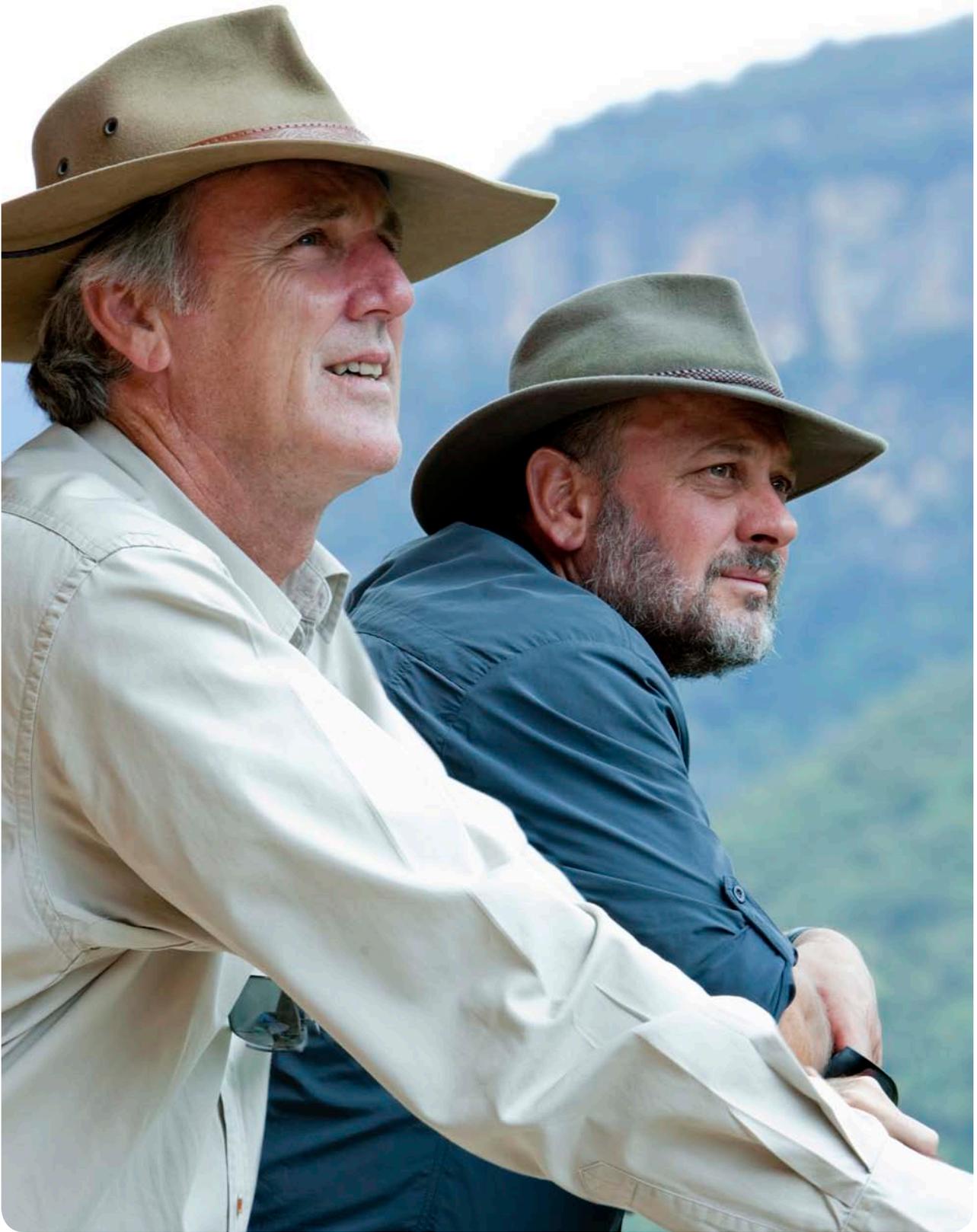
They're not well advertised. **(Man 20s)**

But for most, when it came to deciding to see a movie at the cinema it was the 'story' and buzz surrounding a film that mattered most, rather than where it was made.

I'm Australian through and through but sometimes I don't look for that. If it's something I think is going to be entertaining I'll watch it [at the cinema]. I'm a pretty harsh critic. If it's crap, I won't bother. **(Man 60s)**

I don't think people are watching because it's Australian, necessarily. It's more the storyline [that attracts me to a film]. **(Woman 50s)**

It's the storyline, the celebrity. The actors and stuff. **(Woman late teens)**



2 Types of content

Many different films and TV programs were discussed in the groups. These fell into various genres or 'content clusters', identified below.

2.1 Australiana

Screen stories based on real people and events, particularly in the criminal realm, or quintessential Australian themes such as the outback were popular with participants.

2.2 New nostalgia

The recent rash of TV series delving into Australian life in the 1970s and 1980s including *Howzat*, *Paper Giants* and *Puberty Blues* inspired a sense of nostalgia.

2.3 Suburban/urban dramas

Television dramas that dealt with contemporary themes and social complexity were widely praised by participants – be they mainstream and comedic like *Offspring*, or edgier and political like *The Slap* and *Redfern Now*.

2.4 Satirical comedy/comedy

Participants enjoyed connecting with Australian humour in local screen stories and shared their love of highly original and insightful comedies like *Summer Heights High* and *Angry Boys*.

2.5 Documentary

Participants' passion for 'real life' stories included documentaries such as *Go Back to Where you Came From* and *The First Australians*, and even programs like *Australian Story*.

2.1 Australiana

Screen stories based on real people and events – based in the criminal underworld or the outback – were very popular with participants.

Baz Lurhman's *Australia* was the most obvious example of recent Australiana. Some participants had made the effort to see the film at the cinema, lured by the promise of seeing the Hollywood version of our history on the big screen, with mega-stars Hugh Jackman and Nicole Kidman. Some found the film moving.

I remember that scene where they had to hide in the water tank and it starts filling up and then... the mother eventually drowns. That really stood out to me. If there is one thing that I will remember it will always be that.
(Woman late teens)

But with so much hype surrounding the film, others felt disappointed with the end result.

Australia – that was well known but for all the wrong reasons. It was three and a half hours long. It dragged on.
(Man 20s)

Australia was corny. Corny would be the perfect word for it. It was like an old Clint Eastwood movie that had been modernised. Because Hugh Jackman and Nicole Kidman were in it, it was supposed to be amazing but even they don't cut it sometimes. **(Woman 30s)**

Film and TV series based on true crime were hugely popular with participants. Films inspired by gruesome crimes, hardcore criminals and murderers such as *Chopper*, *Wolf Creek*, *Snowtown* and *Animal Kingdom* were discussed. *Wolf Creek* was singled out as being particularly powerful (and terrifying).

Man 40s 1: Shocking. It was just horrific. Had you on the edge of your seat.

Man 40s 2: Yeah, had you on the edge of your seat.

Man 40s 1: Yeah, very engaging, in the sense of dread.

Wolf Creek cost nearly nothing to make it and it was one of the most popular movies. But it's based on a true story. Anything based on a true story, I'll watch it. It's very Australian, it's outback.
(Woman 30s)

Underbelly was discussed at length, with most participants having engaged with at least one episode of the ongoing crime drama since it debuted in 2008. The fact that each series was based on real Australian events and people was undoubtedly a key point of attraction for participants. But it was also a cause of concern for some others who believed the show normalised crime and violence, while glamorising Australian criminal figures and turning them into glossy, prime time cult heroes.

They put the bad guy [Carl Williams] up on a pedestal. **(Man 60s)**

Woman 30s 1: It's so annoying that someone like Chopper Reid can be so famous. To be put in the spotlight. That just annoys me immensely that we look up to that.

Woman 30s 2: So is that Ibrahim [from *Underbelly*] fellow as well.

Woman 30s 1: That whole *Underbelly* series really glamourises it a lot.

Woman 30s 3: A lot of Australian stuff is about that though, isn't it? There are lots of films about people who have done atrocious things.

Some questioned just how much of what they saw on *Underbelly* was based on fact.

Shows like *Underbelly* are not going to tell you exactly what happened. Don't think anyone to this day knows what really goes on in the Australian underground with the gangsters or whatever you call them. **(Man 60s)**

2.2 New nostalgia

The recent rash of TV series delving into Australian life in the 1970s and 1980s including *Howzat*, *Paper Giants* and *Puberty Blues* inspired a sense of nostalgia amongst many participants.

They embraced these shows for providing a window into eras close enough to be familiar but removed enough for stories to still be educational and intriguing. With TV mini-series like *Howzat* and *Paper Giants*, participants enjoyed the telling of the remarkable yet little known backstories of public figures Kerry Packer and Ita Buttrose.

Woman 30s 1: *Paper Giants* and *Howzat*, these are great Australian stories. We knew bits and pieces because we'd lived through it but didn't know the ins and outs. It let us in and we got the full story.

Woman 30s 2: Also it's a good success story.

Puberty Blues resonated with participants of all age groups for different reasons. For young parents, it was a provocative insight into the lives of teenage girls.

Did you see *Puberty Blues*? It was set in the 1970s. The difference from then to now! Obviously it was a lot more innocent back then but still sort of shocking I think, because I'm a mother. Bella [daughter] is only five, she's not even close to teenage years, but yeah, it was a very real show. It was a lot about parenting, the rights and wrongs and consequences. Big eye-opener for a parent. **(Woman 30s)**



For teenage participants *Puberty Blues* affirmed that the issues they struggle with today are largely the same as they were for teens three decades ago.

Woman late teens 1: I actually loved that [*Puberty Blues*]. The actual story [what happens to characters] still happens today to teenage girls. It's just funny that it happened back then as well.

Woman late teens 2: Like the relationship between two people, the smoking, the drinking, the drugs and all that.

Woman late teens 3: It was so graphic for me. I watched an episode and I was like, 'wow!'

Woman late teens 1: It was just funny to know that everything that happens today happened in your grandparent's generation.

For mothers of young adults, *Puberty Blues* provided an important exploration of contemporary issues.

My kids loved *Puberty Blues*. It was brilliant. It has a whole lot of issues around rape, domestic violence, drugs. **(Woman 50s)**

2.3 Suburban/urban dramas

Television dramas that dealt with contemporary themes and social complexity were widely praised by participants – be they commercial and comedic such as *Packed to the Rafters*, *Offspring* and *House Husbands* or edgier, grittier drama such as *The Slap* and *Redfern Now*.

House Husbands and *Offspring* were viewed as fun and quirky explorations of social change and gender politics.

I don't mind *House Husbands*. And my wife likes it so we watch it. It's quite enjoyable. Some of the characters I like. It's not a bad show. **(Man 60s)**

It's one of those shows you think an American TV show would be about. So now it applies to us and I think it's just funny. You kind of think, this is realistic. It's like a new *Home and Away* for me or a new *Neighbours* but better. **(Woman late teens)**

I loved *Offspring*. It's hilarious. Quirky. Light and it's local. It's very well done. **(Woman 50s)**



As discussed in Part 1.2, **We can learn**, *Redfern Now* provided a rare (albeit fictionalised) window into the lives of urban Indigenous Australians. *The Slap* was discussed as similarly thought provoking, inspiring participants to question their values around parenting.

[*The Slap*] touched a nerve. It raised so many questions. There was a lot of discussion in my family about whether you would or wouldn't smack a child like that. It's not just, 'oh he did something wrong,' this child was extreme. **(Woman 30s)**

I liked the idea that [*The Slap*] posed questions. 'What would you do? What are your values?' That's what it was about. **(Woman 30s)**

2.4 Satirical comedy/comedy

As discussed in Part 1.1, **We can relate**, participants enjoyed connecting with Australian humour in local screen stories. *Summer Heights High* and *Angry Boys* were discussed as highly original comedies.

You need to watch *Summer Heights High*. I put it on and I was crying. It was so funny. Because he's the same guy who plays all these different characters. And he does every single one brilliantly. He is just so clever.

(Woman 30s)

Woman 1 late teens: *Angry Boys* is funny.

Woman 2 late teens: I think that's what's good about Australian TV series as well, they are really original. You don't get the plots you get in *Summer Heights High* in American series.

The point was made that Chris Lilley's shows weren't just funny – they were sharp and perceptive takes on our multicultural and socially complex society. While deliberately crass and exaggerated, his characters were spot-on portrayals of real types of Australians.

Woman late teens 1: Even *Summer Heights High*, as much as it's a joke, it's real.

Woman late teens 2: Yeah, it's real.

Woman late teens 3: There are 20 Ja'mies at our school!

Classic comedies such as *The Dish* and *The Castle* were also discussed.

Man 40s 1: Yeah *The Dish* made an impression on me.

Man 40s 2: *The Castle* was good.

Man 40s 3: I've got the deluxe edition of that one.

Man 40s 1: I don't think they came across as caricatures of Australians. It's funny, realistic as well.



2.5 Documentary

Participants' passion for 'real life' stories included documentary. As discussed in Part 1.2, **We can learn**, *Go Back to Where You Came From* and *First Australians* were praised for offering a window into the present day lives of asylum seekers and history of Indigenous Australians

The television series *Who Do You Think You Are?* was discussed as a moving exploration of the family history of well-known Australians, while *Australian Story* was celebrated for telling the stories of the real people behind the headlines.

Man 60s 1: I think *Australian Story* is one of the best shows in TV.

Man 60s 2: Yeah I do too, good stuff.

Man 60s 1: It informs you about people that have done something different. It could be a good swimmer, could be a good athlete, could be a good farmer or someone who is in need.

Man 60s 3: They profile unselfish people who give and don't expect to receive in return for what they do.



In conclusion...

... Local content, it was clear, was well and truly on their minds as well as in their hearts.

Local screen stories were an important part of participants' media diets. They had watched a wide range of TV programs, TV series and films, which fell into various content clusters or genres.

Television was the key access point to Australian content, with a range of barriers preventing viewers from making the trip to the cinema to catch a local film.

More broadly, Australian content played an important role in the interior lives of participants and their sense of cultural identity.

For many it was a valuable platform for the telling of 'our own stories' – be they portrayals of Australian history (Indigenous or otherwise), real people and events, or fictional tales that captured our way of life and the complexity of our contemporary, multicultural and urban culture.

Methodology

This study is based on a series of affinity group discussions with Australians who had watched at least some Australian films or television shows in the past two years, and employed both classic directed and non-directed qualitative research methodologies.

Groups commenced with a period of non-directed discussion where participants were encouraged to share their thoughts on any local content they had seen, followed by a period of directed discussion where participants were asked specific questions about Australian screen stories.

Sample

The fieldwork for this study involved six group discussions with Australians aged 17 to 69. The discussions took place in Sydney, Melbourne and Orange, NSW in the first week of April 2013. They were based on single sex natural affinity (friendship) groups and were conducted in-home.

Each participant was screened to determine which of the Screen Australia segment profile groups they fell into. See Appendix for a table with these details, including a list of content viewed by each participant over the last two years.

The fieldwork was conducted by members of *The Mind & Mood Report* team, comprising Rebecca Huntley, Laura Demasi and Fiona Collis. Laura Demasi wrote this report and the rest of the team members edited it.

Background of each group

Men, Sydney NSW, 40s: Married with children. Met through their wives. Well-travelled and educated. Primary interaction with Australian content was news and current affairs, albeit they watched everything from *My Kitchen Rules* to Q&A. Due to work and family commitments, they rarely went to the cinema.

Young women, Sydney NSW, late teens: An ethnically diverse group of friends who were completing the HSC. Articulate and consumed a wide variety of Australian content.

Men, Orange NSW, 60s: All Australian born and raised. Long time friends and one pair of siblings. Watched a range of popular TV content from commercial sitcoms and dramas to ABC's *Australian Story*. Also regular and enthusiastic cinema-goers.

Women, Orange NSW, 30s: All Australian born and raised apart from one participant, who migrated from England 10 years ago. Became friends through their children attending local school, also one pair of siblings. Greater engagement with TV than cinema because of their young children.

Women, Melbourne VIC, 50s: Lived in the inner suburbs. Regular and enthusiastic film-goers. Watched a wide range of television programs and channels including ABC and SBS, and were able to talk at length about trends and changes they had noticed in Australian content over the years.

Men, Melbourne VIC, 20s: Friends from university days. All were born in India and moved to Australia in their late teens or early twenties on international student visas. They now lived here as permanent residents, and several were married and had children. Grew up watching Bollywood films and US blockbusters and sitcoms and were not strongly drawn to Australian content. Had not seen a wide range of Australian films or television shows, however, most of them had seen *Australia* and *Animal Kingdom* and enjoyed the *Underbelly* series. Australian reality and game shows were also popular.

Appendix

Sample notes on Screen Australia profile segments and content lists

During the recruitment phase of this research, participants were asked to provide some examples of Australian content that they had seen, either at the cinema, online or on TV. The lists they provided are summarised in the table below, alongside the Screen Australia profiles they identified with most strongly: Connectors, Providers, Roamers or Offliners (from Screen Australia's 2012 'What To Watch: Audience Motivation in a Multi-Screen World')

– see http://www.screenaustralia.gov.au/documents/SA_publications/Rpt_WhattoWatch.pdf

Please note that this is not a complete reflection of the range of films and programs they talked about in the group discussions. Talking about film and television prompted participants to recall and discuss many more.

Men, 40s, Sydney

Participant	Ethnic background	Screen Aust profile segment	Local FILMS seen recently	Local TV PROGRAMS seen in last two years
1	Australian	Provider	<i>Red Dog, Wolf Creek, Australia</i>	<i>Bikie Wars, Offspring, Underbelly, Border Security, The Force, Australian Story</i>
2	Australian	Offliner	<i>Red Dog, Australia, The Sapphires</i>	<i>Underbelly, Packed to the Rafters, Winners & Losers, House Husbands, Kath & Kim, Summer Heights High</i>
3	Australian	Provider	<i>Wolf Creek</i>	<i>Underbelly series 1, Deal or No Deal</i>
4	Australian	Provider	<i>Australia</i>	<i>Kath & Kim, Neighbours, Summer Heights High</i>

Women, late teens, Sydney

Participant	Ethnic background	Screen Aust profile segment	Local FILMS seen recently	Local TV PROGRAMS seen in last two years
1	Chinese/Tongan	Connector	<i>Australia</i>	<i>Home and Away, Underbelly, House Husbands, Kath & Kim, Summer Heights High</i>
2	Filipino/Polish	Connector	<i>Australia, The Sapphires</i>	<i>Home and Away</i>
3	Italian	Connector	<i>The Sapphires, Red Dog, Mental</i>	<i>Underbelly, Puberty Blues, Offspring, Deal or No Deal, House Husbands, Kath & Kim, Neighbours, Summer Heights High</i>
4	African	Provider/Roamer	<i>The Sapphires, Australia, Kath and Kimderella</i>	<i>Packed to the Rafters, Deal or No Deal, Winners & Losers, Kath & Kim, Home and Away, Neighbours</i>

Men, 60s, Orange NSW

Participant	Ethnic background	Screen Aust profile segment	Local FILMS seen recently	Local TV PROGRAMS seen in last two years
1	Australian	Offliner	<i>Red Dog, Australia</i>	<i>Underbelly, Offspring, The Force</i>
2	Australian	Offliner	<i>Red Dog</i>	<i>Underbelly, Puberty Blues, Packed to the Rafters, House Husbands, Kath & Kim, Deal or No Deal</i>
3	Australian	Offliner	<i>Red Dog, Australia</i>	<i>Underbelly, Packed to the Rafters, Deal or No Deal, Kath & Kim</i>
4	Australian	Offliner	<i>Australia</i>	<i>Deal or No Deal, Winners & Losers, House Husbands, Kath & Kim, Summer Heights High, Packed to the Rafters, Underbelly</i>

Women, 30s, Orange NSW

Participant	Ethnic background	Screen Aust profile segment	Local FILMS seen recently	Local TV PROGRAMS seen in last two years
1	Australian	Offliner	<i>Red Dog, Snowtown, Kath & Kimderella</i>	<i>Offspring, Underbelly, Bikie Wars, Packed to the Rafters, Kath & Kim</i>
2	English	Roamer	<i>The Sapphires, Wolf Creek, Red Dog</i>	<i>Underbelly, Puberty Blues, Packed to the Rafters, Offspring, Winners & Losers, House Husbands, Kath & Kim, Home and Away, Summer Heights High</i>
3	Australian	Offliner	<i>Wolf Creek, Red Dog</i>	<i>Packed to the Rafters, Kath & Kim</i>
4	Australian	Provider	<i>Red Dog</i>	<i>Packed to the Rafters, Offspring, Kath & Kim, Home and Away, Underbelly</i>

Women, 50s, Melbourne

Participant	Ethnic background	Screen Aust profile segment	Local FILMS seen recently	Local TV PROGRAMS seen in last two years
1	Australian	Roamer	<i>Wolf Creek, The Sapphires, Australia, Red Dog</i>	<i>Offspring, Packed to the Rafters, Spicks and Specks, Mad as Hell, Winners and Losers, Rush, City Homicide, Underbelly</i>
2	English	Roamer	-	<i>Offspring, Winners & Losers, House Husbands, Kath & Kim, Summer Heights High</i>
3	Australian	Roamer	<i>The Sapphires, Wolf Creek, Red Dog, Animal Kingdom, Australia, Kath & Kimderella</i>	<i>House Husbands, Kath & Kim, Home and Away, Neighbours, Summer Heights High, The Force, Border Security</i>
4	Australian	Roamer	<i>The Sapphires, Wolf Creek, Australia</i>	<i>Offspring, Deal or No Deal, Kath & Kim, Summer Heights High</i>
5	Australian	Roamer	<i>Mental, The Sapphires, Wolf Creek, Red Dog, Australia, Animal Kingdom</i>	<i>Packed to the Rafters, Puberty Blues, Underbelly, Offspring, Deal or No Deal, Winners & Losers, House Husbands, Home and Away, Summer Heights High</i>

Men, 20s, Melbourne

Participant	Ethnic background	Screen Aust profile segment	Local FILMS seen recently	Local TV PROGRAMS seen in last two years
1	Indian	Connector	<i>Australia</i>	<i>Home and Away, Puberty Blues, My Kitchen Rules, Packed to the Rafters, Border Security</i>
2	Indian	Provider	<i>Red Dog, Animal Kingdom, Australia</i>	<i>Underbelly, Kath & Kim</i>
3	Indian	Connector	-	<i>Underbelly, Offspring, Deal or No Deal, Kath & Kim</i>
4	Indian	Provider	-	<i>Deal or No Deal, Masterchef</i>
5	Indian	Roamer	<i>Animal Kingdom</i>	<i>Deal or No Deal</i>



Australian Government



18 June 2013
Commissioned by Screen Australia