



Australian Government



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CEO's 2021 Year in Review and 2022 Preview

Friday 11 February 2022: In 2021 the screen industry continued to adapt to working in the COVID-19 pandemic, as planning for sudden lockdowns, COVID-Safe ways of working and additional COVID-related costs became the norm. The sector has shown incredible levels of creativity and resilience in producing and distributing content with [record-breaking expenditure figures](#). We enter 2022 knowing that significant challenges and opportunities lie ahead particularly with the arrival of the Omicron variant and logistical issues around supply chains and travel plans.

At the beginning of each year, the agency looks back at the previous year's Australian box office data, television ratings and online viewing figures alongside research such as the [Drama Report](#) to provide a more comprehensive snapshot of the sector.

Screen Australia's CEO **Graeme Mason** said, "While box office, television ratings and online viewership figures over the past year remain valuable in measuring the overall health of the industry, similar to 2020 we can't rely solely on these. It is key to consider the impact the pandemic wrought - particularly on our friends in cinema distribution, who went from having three Australian films at the top of the box office in February, to state-wide lockdowns in NSW and Victoria six months later. It's not surprising to see the flow-on effect of this in the full local box office figures. More and more content also continues to premiere on streaming services, who keep viewing figures internally, but also have global reach."

Screen Australia's [latest Drama Report](#) showed a record-breaking level of expenditure on drama production in Australia in 2020/21 of \$1.9 billion, more than 50% above the five-year average. The unprecedented increase is attributed to projects postponed into the year by COVID shutdowns as well as low levels of COVID-19 in Australia during 2020/21 making Australia an attractive destination, and high-profile Australian creatives attracting foreign titles along with a very strong slate of new Australian projects.

In January 2021 the [Our Summer of Cinema campaign](#), a joint effort between distributors, exhibitors, projects and Screen Australia to entice audiences back into cinemas, helped bring in more than \$30 million at the box office for local features [The Dry](#), [Penguin Bloom](#), [High Ground](#) and [Firestarter - The Story of Bangarra](#).

Feature film is set to continue to shine in 2022. [Here Out West](#) released last week (3 Feb) and [Wyrmswood Apocalypse](#) released on 10 February. The upcoming slate also includes [Falling for Figaro](#) (24 Feb), [Ruby's Choice](#) (24 Feb), [Mother Mountain](#) (28 Apr), [The Drover's Wife: The Legend of Molly Johnson](#) (5 May), [How To Please A Woman](#) (26 May) and Baz Luhrmann's Elvis biopic (23 June). This year production for director Dr George Miller's Mad Max prequel [Furiosa](#) kicks off, which is set to be one of the biggest movies ever to shoot in Australia.

In television, the second season of the very popular Stan Original series [Bump](#) started off the year, with a third season already in the pipeline, and [The PM's Daughter](#) launched on ABC. Upcoming television series include [Troppo](#) (ABC, 27 Feb), [After the Verdict](#) (Network 9) and [Barons](#) (ABC), [Maverix](#) (ABC), [The Secrets She Keeps Series 2](#) (Network 10), [Surviving Summer](#) (Netflix) and [Darby and Joan](#) (Acorn TV).

Online projects due to release in 2022 include [A Beginner's Guide to Grief](#) on SBS On Demand, funded via the Digital Originals initiative, as well as [Ginger and the Vegesaur](#) (ABC iview), [First Day Series 2](#) (ABC iview) and [Meta Runner Series 3](#) (YouTube), and [The Monster with Me](#) (TikTok).

In documentary, [River](#), the follow up to award-winning feature documentary [Mountain](#) is releasing in March along with feature documentaries [Anonymous Club](#) and [Blind Ambition](#). Forthcoming television documentaries include [First Wars](#) (SBS), [Ningaloo](#) (ABC), [Missing Persons Investigation](#) (Network 9), and [Shipwreck Hunters Australia](#) (Disney+).

Screen Australia's First Nations Department has a strong slate of upcoming projects. In television this includes the drama series [True Colours](#) (SBS/NITV) and the much anticipated third season of [Mystery Road](#),

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which is set to go back to where it all started with Detective Jay Swan in [Mystery Road: Origin](#) (ABC). Coming soon in film are Jub Clerc’s feature debut [Sweet As](#), as well as [We are Still Here](#), the joint anthology feature made by eight teams as a co-production with the support of the New Zealand Film Commission (NZFC) and the First Nations Department. In documentary, the upcoming slate includes feature documentaries [Alick and Albert](#) and [Larapinta](#) (NITV), as well as the six-part series [Our Law](#) (NITV), set in Australia’s first and only First Nations-run police station.

Mason said, “2022 is shaping up to be an exciting year, both in production and also the fantastic releases across various platforms. I would encourage the sector to continue thinking about how they can take that same collaborative, resilient and adaptable spirit they’ve demonstrated throughout two years of this pandemic, and bring it into the year ahead. We know it’s tough as we head into a third year, and we will continue to look at how we can best support the industry to deal with the various challenges.”

FILM

According to data from the Motion Picture Distributors Association of Australia (MPDAA) and Numero, Australian films took \$71.5 million at the local box office, 11.8% of the total share. This result came during a year that continued to see sudden lockdowns particularly in NSW and Victoria, which traditionally represent over half of the domestic box office. In 2021, 52 Australian films were released, and 513 foreign titles including large studio tentpoles that had been held back by the pandemic. Six of the top 10 performing Australian films were supported by Screen Australia.

| Position | Title | Release | 2021 Box Office |
|----------|---|-----------------------------|-----------------|
| 1 | Peter Rabbit 2 | Blockbuster (400+ prints) | \$21,967,130 |
| 2 | The Dry* | Blockbuster (400+ prints) | \$20,120,076 |
| 3 | Mortal Kombat | Wide (200-399 prints) | \$9,311,043 |
| 4 | Penguin Bloom* | Wide (200-399 prints) | \$7,477,756 |
| 5 | High Ground* | Wide (200-399 prints) | \$2,973,403 |
| 6 | June Again* | Wide (200-399 prints) | \$2,522,585 |
| 7 | Buckley’s Chance | Wide (200-399 prints) | \$925,483 |
| 8 | Long Story Short* | Wide (200-399 prints) | \$772,069 |
| 9 | Girls Can’t Surf* | Mainstream (100-199 prints) | \$625,728 |
| 10 | Maya the Bee: The Golden Orb (Official Co-pro Australia/Germany) | Wide (200-399 prints) | \$546,869 |

*Supported by Screen Australia

Mason continued, “Australian audiences came out in force last summer to enjoy the theatrical experience. While we have encountered further challenges in the pandemic, it’s great to see how much people love getting out to the cinema when they are able to, connecting with local stories for young and old. I encourage Australians to continue enjoying the immersive big screen cinema experience and supporting Australian films this year.”

“Australian films also achieved great success in leading film festivals with particular international success for [The Drover’s Wife: The Legend of Molly Johnson](#) premiering at SXSW, [Playing with Sharks](#) at Sundance, [Nitram](#) at the Cannes Film Festival, Tribeca Film Festival favourites [Girls Can’t Surf](#) which received its world premiere as well as [Blind Ambition](#) which won the Audience Award, [River](#) premiering at Telluride and [The Power of the Dog](#) winning prizes and acclaim everywhere.”

TELEVISION

“The calibre of the local television shows hitting our screens in 2021 was outstanding, including [The Newsreader](#) which took home five AACTA Awards and [Fisk](#) which not only reached the top-viewed free-to-air drama, but was awarded Best Series in the Comedies Competition at Series Mania. Our television continues to



sell and engage with international audiences; some of our top performing drama’s this past year were children’s series [100% Wolf: Legend of the Moonstone](#) and [Kangaroo Beach](#) and mini-series [RFDS](#), [The Newsreader](#) and [The Unusual Suspects](#).” said Mason.

Six of the top 10 Australian adult TV dramas in 2021 were broadcast on ABC, with commercial broadcasters Seven and Nine also represented in the 10 most popular shows.

TOP 10 AUSTRALIAN ADULT TV DRAMA SERIES ON FREE TO AIR

| Position | Title | Episodes | Broadcaster | Ratings [^] |
|----------|--------------------------|----------|-------------|----------------------|
| 1 | Fisk * | 6 | ABC | 1,394,000 |
| 2 | RFDS * | 8 | Seven | 1,027,000 |
| 3 | Home and Away series 34 | 240 | Seven | 976,000 |
| 4 | The Newsreader * | 6 | ABC | 904,000 |
| 5 | Harrow series 3 | 10 | ABC | 834,000 |
| 6 | Rosehaven series 5 | 8 | ABC | 829,000 |
| 7 | Jack Irish series 3 | 4 | ABC | 814,000 |
| 8 | Doctor Doctor series 5 | 8 | Nine | 751,000 |
| 9 | Amazing Grace * | 8 | Nine | 704,000 |
| 10 | Total Control series 2 * | 6 | ABC | 696,000 |

*Screen Australia funded.

[^] average audience, metro + regional 28 day, see source notes.

“Australian children’s television also continues to make waves around the world. [First Day](#) won an International Emmy Award, [Dive Club](#) reached the [top 10 most watched list on Netflix](#) in multiple territories, and of course we can’t forget [Bluey](#), which delighted families with its third season and remains the highest rated program in the history of ABC Kids .”

Following the [Bluey](#) Series 3 premiere in November last year, it has achieved a total average audience of 5.17 million in 2021 across all broadcasts and ABC iview. After being available for just over a month, Bluey Series 3 achieved a VPM average audience of 2.34 million on ABC iview in 2021, making it the top-rated new series to launch last year.

In documentary, local series remain popular, with the bulk of content commissioned by the public broadcasters.

“We’re thrilled to see so many impactful documentaries over the past year, with bold and original storytelling capturing social issues, contemporary Australian culture and natural history. It was great to see the wonderful international reception to the second season of heart-warming series [Love on the Spectrum](#). In 2021 we saw more Australian documentaries hitting streaming platforms including [Unheard](#) on Amazon Prime and [Puff: The Wonders of the Reef](#) on Netflix.”

Due to complexities in the definition of documentary, only the top 10 Screen Australia-funded documentaries on free-to-air television are included below.

| Position | Title | Episodes | Broadcaster | Ratings [^] |
|----------|---|----------|-------------|----------------------|
| 1 | Quoll Farm | 1 | ABC | 935,000 |
| 2 | Love on the Spectrum series 2 | 5 | ABC | 817,000 |
| 3 | Nurses eps 1 - 7 | 7 | Seven | 718,000 |
| 4 | Finding the Archibald | 3 | ABC | 664,000 |
| 5 | David Attenborough's Life in Colour | 3 | Nine | 544,000 |
| 6 | My Name is Gulpilil | 1 | ABC | 504,000 |
| 7 | Birdsville or Bust (Part of Untold Australia) | 1 | SBS | 494,000 |



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|----|--|---|-----|---------|
| 8 | Books that Made Us | 3 | ABC | 473,000 |
| 9 | Australia's Health Revolution with Dr Michael Mosley | 3 | SBS | 458,000 |
| 10 | Going Country | 2 | ABC | 454,000 |

^ average audience, metro + regional 28 day, see source notes.

ONLINE

Mason said, "Online creators continue to push the boundaries and gain impressive engagement. The first episode of [Superwog Series 2](#) notched up 7.8 million views on YouTube - an enormous feat! We also saw [Scattered](#), which was the first Screen Australia-funded project for release on TikTok, gain over 2 million views across the series and trailer."

ABC iview series [All My Friends Are Racist](#) won the AACTA Award for Best Online Comedy, and [The Tailings](#) (SBS On Demand) won for Best Online Drama. Internationally, VR Project [Prison X - Chapter 1: The Devil and the Sun](#) premiered at Sundance, and [Iggly & Ace](#), the first project funded for production through the Digital Originals initiative, screened at Series Mania.

Glitch Productions, the team behind successful YouTube series [Meta Runner](#), followed up with spin-off series [Sunset Paradise](#) which gained over 8.7 million views. Director Luke Eve released [ReCancelled](#), a sequel to his lockdown drama [Cancelled](#), on Facebook where it gained over 3.3 million views.

FIRST NATIONS

The First Nations Department at Screen Australia fund content and creators in film, television and online, as well as various initiatives and talent escalation programs. Led by the Head of First Nations Angela Bates, who took over the role from Penny Smallacombe in 2021, the Department saw the release of projects [Total Control Series 2](#) (one of the top 10 adult TV dramas in 2021); series 3 of celebrated children's series [Little J & Big Cuz](#); ABC comedy series [Preppers](#); and powerful documentary special [Incarceration Nation](#) as part of the SBS Australia Uncovered series. The Department also co-managed and released two projects with the Online Unit at Screen Australia: AACTA award-winning ABC series [All My Friends Are Racist](#) and animated comedy series [Cooked](#).

The First Nations Department is also focused on upskilling creators and in 2021 that included the Developing the Developer Program to increase the pool of Indigenous assessors; the conclusion of a 15-month Indigenous Producers Program; the No Ordinary Black short film initiative with NITV; and the First Nations Creator Program with Instagram, to accelerate careers and amplify voices across the social media platform.

SCREEN AUSTRALIA

Screen Australia continued to work with the Federal Government in 2021 to assist the industry. The agency administered two targeted funds that have been extended into 2022: the \$50 million [Temporary Interruption Fund \(TIF\)](#) and the \$20 million [Supporting Cinemas' Retention Endurance and Enhancement of Neighbourhoods \(SCREEN\) Fund](#). By the end of 2021, 77 applications had been approved for coverage under the TIF across every state and territory. Of this, 69 productions have so far completed their shoots with production budgets totalling \$482.79 million. Applications for the SCREEN Fund opened in April 2021 and by end of December, 199 independent cinemas across Australia had been approved grants worth more than \$10.44 million to support their continuing viability and recovery. The remaining \$9 million has been made available and a second round of the fund will run until 29 April 2022.

Screen Australia also welcomed additional funding from the Australian Government to further assist the sector. In 2022 the agency will be allocating additional production funding to help projects and producers connect to audiences, after receiving an additional \$30 million spread over 2021/22 and 2022/23. Screen

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Australia has already allocated additional funding towards script writing and development, after receiving an additional \$3 million over three years from 2020/21.

The agency also looks forward to working with the screen sector in 2022 on the implementation of changes to the Producer Offset, a rebate that Screen Australia administers on behalf of the Federal Government. This follows the announcement in December that [Parliament passed the bill](#) to bring into effect the raising of the Producer Offset for television productions to 30%.

“This is a historic moment in our industry and one many have worked hard to achieve. This was a welcome piece of positive news for many going into Christmas, and the new 30% rebate for small screen productions is a major increase in support. We will be providing more information in the coming weeks, but producers will also need to be mindful and budget for extended timeframes as our Producer Offset and Co-production Unit work through a glut of applications during this busy time,” said **Mason**.

Looking ahead, in 2022 Screen Australia will be releasing the follow-up to the [landmark 2016 report *Seeing Ourselves: Reflections on Diversity in Australian TV*](#) and again provide data and analysis on representation on Australian screens.

Mason said, “When this report releases, we hope it will provide the sector with an empowering tool to continue to push for a more inclusive industry. It is our job, not just at Screen Australia, but as screen practitioners, to reflect a true representation of Australia. Audiences deserve to see themselves on screen, and to explore a wide range of fantastic stories.”

SOURCE NOTES

Please source all data when reporting.

- Metropolitan data is copyright to OzTAM and Regional data is copyright to RegionalTAM and may not be reproduced, published or communicated in whole or part without the prior consent of OzTAM or RegionalTAM.
- All ratings are courtesy of OzTAM and RegionalTAM, 5-city-metro, combined markets, total people, average audience, consolidated 28 day except where noted.
- Top 10 Australian dramas (metro viewers 000s): 1,009, 607, 595, 627, 556, 558, 569, 520, 516, 453
- Top 10 Screen Australia funded documentaries (metro viewers 000s): 603, 587, 425, 488, 371, 317, 314, 337, 331, 280
- OzTAM Video Player Measurement - consolidated 28. VPM Rating: total minutes played divided by content length. Top programs are for episodes with a minimum length of 15 minutes. Includes catch up minutes only and is not restricted to the five metropolitan cities. Live streaming channel viewing is reported separately.
- Bluey VPM data supplied by the ABC.
- All domestic box office figures courtesy of the MPDAA and Numero.
- International box office data courtesy of comscore.
- Online views are reported by the respective content platform, and are not comparable with viewing metrics from other platforms.

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