

CEO's 2020 Year in Review and 2021 Preview

Wednesday 20 January 2021: 2020 was shaping up to be a record year for many areas of local screen content production until the COVID-19 pandemic significantly disrupted our lives. The entire screen sector was impacted by the pandemic in a way we have never seen before. Despite the challenges COVID-19 wrought, the screen industry demonstrated immense creativity and resilience, and a wealth of screen content across film, television and online was created, released and celebrated. The local industry was incredible as it quickly adapted to the challenges caused by the virus and found ways to continue to work, and create and distribute content.

At the beginning of every year Screen Australia looks back at the previous year's Australian box office data, television ratings and online viewing figures. This data completes the [set of annual, objective metrics](#) which Screen Australia utilises to monitor the health of the local screen industry, including the annual [Drama Report](#), and the agency's own spend on content. But 2020 was not a normal year, and so while we can gain valuable insights from this data it shouldn't be viewed in isolation. Rather it should be considered as a snapshot of a never before seen environment and in conjunction with how the Australian screen industry pulled together, collaborated, and adapted to create and release content at a time when our viewing habits and lifestyles changed dramatically.

Screen Australia CEO **Graeme Mason** said, "It is difficult to assess the health of the industry based on box office, television ratings and online viewership figures over the past year given the impact the pandemic had on society, our lifestyles and the way we consume content. But it is important to view this data holistically with other industry trends to see what has resonated and admire the scope of content released during such a difficult year. The pandemic had a seismic impact on a number of sectors, with cinema and exhibition being one of the most affected in the country with the closure of venues and delays to theatrical content being released. Unsurprisingly we've seen that reflected in last year's local box office figures, which are down significantly on the previous year. While 2020 will always be the year that COVID-19 hit us hard, 2020 was also a time that saw screen stories become more important, more sought after, and more innovative than they ever have been."

"I commend Australian creatives on their tenacity and persistence in forging ahead, and ability to find new ways to create and tell distinctly Australian stories that were valued by audiences here and resonated globally. I particularly want to recognise all the distribution partners whose businesses were so impacted. When you think of the challenges it is a truly remarkable achievement that so many Australian stories were released, and many more were able to be created and developed."

In order to reflect on the performance of the screen sector in 2020 it is important to consider the content that was released across all platforms and resonated with local audiences.

The latest [Drama Report](#) found that expenditure in 2019/20 on drama production in Australia still reached \$991 million, though down 18% on the previous year's spend. The fall was largely due to the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic and the near total shutdown of drama production in March 2020.

Screen Australia directly injected over \$73 million into the screen sector in 2019/20. This included \$41 million for the production of narrative content for television drama, features, children's television, and online productions, \$15 million to the documentary sector and more than \$5.6 million to the development and production of Indigenous content and special initiatives (refer [appendix 3](#)). An additional \$195.92 million was provided by the Federal Government through the

Producer Offset tax incentive administered by Screen Australia.

Since COVID-19 first reached Australia, Screen Australia has provided over \$8.6 million in funding to projects that have been impacted and needed help to start again and be COVID-safe.

The agency continues to administer the \$50 million Temporary Interruption Fund (TIF) announced by the Federal Government in June 2020. This Fund has been a vital piece of the complex screen financing landscape and crucial in assisting some 35 projects as at January 2020 to go into physical production.

“While 2021 will continue to challenge the sector as we all work within the new normal, I’m buoyed by the breadth of local content releasing over the next 12 months. It is great to start the year with the success of feature film [The Dry](#) which has already taken over \$10 million at the local box office, demonstrating the value local audiences place on seeing Australian stories on the big screen.”

“2021 is on track to be a very strong year for local productions and a good one for the release of Australian stories. It is extraordinary how productions have adapted their schedules and plans to ensure they can film in a controlled COVID-safe way and I’m particularly impressed at the volume of television titles that were able to wrap filming before the end of last year.”

“The generous incentives from the Federal Government to attract in-bound big budget productions coupled with Australia’s success at controlling the virus has also made Australia an even more attractive filming location, which is creating good current opportunities and also long-term potential.”

Following in *The Dry*’s footsteps are an impressive line-up of features scheduled to release in 2021 including [Penguin Bloom](#) (21 Jan), [High Ground](#) (28 Jan) and [Long Story Short](#) (11 Feb). Other films set for a 2021 release include Leah Purcell’s [The Drover’s Wife: The Legend of Molly Johnson](#), [I Met a Girl](#) and political thriller [Lone Wolf](#).

Stan Original series [Bump](#) kicked off the 2021 television debuts, proving so popular a second series has already been announced. Upcoming releases to follow include [Kangaroo Beach](#) (ABC, 25 Jan), [Aftertaste](#) (ABC, 3 Feb), [Eden](#) (Stan), [New Gold Mountain](#) (SBS), [RFDS](#) (Seven), [The Newsreader](#) (ABC), [Five Bedrooms S2](#) (Ten), [Amazing Grace](#) (Nine), [The Unusual Suspects](#) (SBS), [Wakefield](#) (ABC), and [The Bureau of Magical Things S2](#) (Ten).

Online content due for release in 2021 includes animated comedy series [Cooked](#) (26 Jan, ABC iview/YouTube), the second series of [Superwog](#) (ABC/YouTube), Fresh Blood comedy graduate [Why Are You Like This](#) (16 Feb, ABC/Netflix), vertical series [Scattered](#) (TikTok), Tasmanian series [The Tailings](#) (SBS On Demand), and LGBTQIA teen series [Flunk](#) (YouTube).

2021 documentary titles began with the launch of SBS Untold Australia documentaries [Stutter School](#) (5 Jan), [Birdsville or Bust](#) (12 Jan) and [Bowled Over](#) (19 Jan). Forthcoming titles include feature documentaries [Firestarter](#) (18 Feb), [Girls Can’t Surf](#) (11 March) and [Blind Ambition](#) as well as television documentaries [First Wars](#) (SBS), [Microworlds: Reef](#) (Netflix), [Finding the Archibald](#) (ABC), and [The Fight Together](#) (NITV).

FILM

According to data from the Motion Picture Distributors Association of Australia (MPDAA) and Numero, Australian films took \$22.6 million at the local box office in a year like no other, with

cinemas shut for extended periods due to COVID-19 and particularly in Victoria, which based on a five-year-average typically holds 27% share of the domestic box office. 39 Australian films were released, compared to 362 foreign titles. Nine of the top 10 performing Australian films were supported by Screen Australia. Both Australian and foreign films' release schedules were significantly disrupted by the pandemic.

Position	Title	Release	2020 Box Office
1	<i>The Invisible Man</i>	Wide (200-399 prints)	\$9,088,367
2	<i>Rams</i>	Wide (200-399 prints)	\$4,436,400
3	<i>Miss Fisher And The Crypt Of Tears</i>	Wide (200-399 prints)	\$3,031,806
4	<i>Never Too Late</i>	Mainstream (100-199 prints)	\$945,293
5	<i>Go!</i>	Wide (200-399 prints)	\$848,290
6	<i>Dirt Music</i>	Wide (200-399 prints)	\$643,824
7	<i>Babyteeth</i>	Speciality (20-99)	\$459,675
8	<i>Slim & I</i>	Mainstream (100-199 prints)	\$432,524
9	<i>H Is for Happiness</i>	Mainstream (100-199 prints)	\$404,626
10	<i>In My Blood It Runs</i>	Limited (1-19 prints)	\$373,470

Box office courtesy of the MPDAA and Numero.

Mason continued, "I'm delighted to see that Australians have supported *The Dry* in such large numbers. I encourage all Australians to rediscover the immersive big screen cinema experience and go out to support *Penguin Bloom*, *High Ground*, and *Firestarter* as well as other local titles releasing in the year."

Screen Australia [launched a campaign in December](#) to support Australian films launching over summer and encourage audiences back to the cinema. In collaboration with each of the films' distributors a suite of marketing assets were created for cinema, broadcast, digital and social media channels to promote the cinema experience.

"With cinemas closed for an extended period throughout 2020 and release schedules thrown into disarray, many local productions were forced to change their plans. It's fantastic that Australian films found alternate pathways to audience. Titles like TIFF-selected [I Am Woman](#) and Sundance hit [Relic](#) released on Stan, while children's animated film [100% Wolf](#) was released via premium Video On Demand and released in 21 territories taking \$6.2 million for Rest of World (ROW) including \$2.7 million in the United Kingdom."

TELEVISION

"The quality of Australian television drama in 2020 was world class and should be celebrated. It's no accident that [Stateless](#) and the second series of [Mystery Road](#) were selected to make their world premiere at the Berlin International Film Festival. Our television content continues to punch above its weight and resonate with audiences here and around the world."

"[The Secrets She Keeps](#) secured a prime time premiere on flagship channel BBC1 and [was the sixth most watched series on BBCiplayer](#). *Stateless* reached a worldwide audience on Netflix following its successful premiere on ABC in Australia, and The New York Times included the second series of

Mystery Road, which screened on Acorn in the US, in their [top 20 Best International Shows of the year](#). The Chinese adaptation of ABC series *Miss Fisher's Murder Mysteries* created by Every Cloud Productions [screened across Southeast Asia](#)."

Four of the top 10 Australian dramas in 2020 were broadcast on the ABC, with all the commercial free to air broadcasters also represented amongst the most popular shows.

Top 10 Australian Adult TV Drama Series on Free To Air

Position	Title	Episodes	Broadcaster	Ratings [^]
1	<i>Mystery Road S2*</i>	6	ABC	1,200,000
2	<i>Informer 3838</i>	2	Nine	1,089,000
3	<i>Home and Away</i>	206	Seven	1,012,000 **
4	<i>Halifax: Retribution *</i>	8	Nine	999,000
5	<i>Doctor Doctor series 4</i>	10	Nine	956,000
6	<i>Operation Buffalo *</i>	6	ABC	895,000
7	<i>Rosehaven series 4</i>	8	ABC	893,000
8	<i>Stateless *</i>	6	ABC	791,000
9	<i>The Secrets She Keeps *</i>	6	Ten	711,000
10	<i>How to Stay Married series 2 *</i>	8	Ten	596,000

*Screen Australia funded. ^average audience, metro + regional 28 day, see source notes.

** As 1 Jan 2021.

Catch up remains an increasingly popular option for audiences and needs to be factored in when considering the reach of local content. Episodes of *Stateless* recorded between 125,000 and 181,000 views on iview while *Mystery Road series 2* had 159,000 to 209,000 views. SBS documentary [Addicted Australia](#) attracted a significant online audience also, capturing 81,000 to 137,000 views across four episodes via SBS On Demand.

"It would be remiss of me to speak to the success of our local television content without talking about our favourite Blue Heeler *Bluey*, whose popularity continues to grow here in Australia and all over the world with the series reaching more than 110 territories including the US, UK and China. It remains the most watched show on ABC iview."

The second series of [Bluey](#) had 177 million program plays and achieved a Video Player Measurement (VPM) average audience of 2.8 million in 2020. It is currently the highest rated series ever on ABC iview, with the first series only just behind with 2.75 million. The first release episodes of the second series achieved a broadcast average audience of 505,000 at 8am and 1.6 million at 6.20pm on ABC Kids. The first series of *Bluey* won an International Emmy Award for best preschool program in March 2020.

Created by Ludo Studios in Brisbane, *Bluey* is one of many success stories for children's content in 2020. Another is the Northern Pictures-produced ABC children's series *Hardball*, which won an International Emmy Kids Awards in the category Kids: Live-Action Emmy in October. *Hardball's* lively story of Mikey and his dream to become the best handball champ in Western Sydney also won the [Prix Jeunesse International Award](#) for best fiction program for 7 to 10-year-olds and the Rockie Award for the Best Children & Youth Fiction Series at the Banff World Media Festival in Canada in June 2020.

Ground-breaking ABC Me children's series *First Day* won the prestigious Rose d'Or Award, which celebrates screen excellence and achievement from around the world. Produced by Epic Films, the series won the Children and Youth Award for its powerful story about a transgender girl starting high school and finding the courage to live as her most authentic self. Written and directed by Julie Kalceff, the series sold to BBC and will screen on CBBC in the UK.

Local television documentaries remain popular, with the bulk of content commissioned by the public broadcasters.

"Australians continue to be drawn to documentaries that challenge us, provoke debate and educate on issues such as race, climate change and the environment."

"Heart-warming series *Love on the Spectrum* from Northern Pictures reached new audiences with a worldwide Netflix release following its successful debut on ABC in 2019 and has already been commissioned for a new series."

Series remain the most popular documentary format, however feature documentaries *The Australian Dream* and *Wayne* also delivered strong results on broadcast, even after their successful theatrical releases in 2019 and 2018 respectively.

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

Position	Title	Episodes	Broadcaster	Ratings [^]
1	<i>Miriam Margolyes Almost Australian</i>	3	ABC	1,026,000
2	<i>Shaun Micallef's On the Sauce</i>	3	ABC	985,000
3	<i>Fight For Planet A</i>	3	ABC	846,000
4	<i>Maralinga Tjarutja</i>	1	ABC	785,000
5	<i>Lindy Chamberlain: The True Story</i>	2	Ten	754,000
6	<i>Big Weather (And How to Survive It)</i>	3	ABC	725,000
7	<i>Revelation</i>	3	ABC	723,000
8	<i>Outback Ringer</i>	10	ABC	646,000 **
9	<i>The Australian Dream</i>	1	ABC	622,000
10	<i>Wayne</i>	1	ABC	572,000

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

** As 1 Jan 2021.

ONLINE

“Australian online content creators continue to push boundaries, carve out a niche, hone their skills, and connect with audiences in a unique and engaging way. Three series funded through the agency’s Online Production program were created and aired in the midst of lockdown: Facebook series [Cancelled](#), and ABC series’ [At Home Alone Together](#) and [Retrograde](#). The ingenuity of these creatives to write and film during the peak of COVID’s first wave is commendable, and showed the ability of our local industry to still produce high-quality content under incredibly trying circumstances,” continued **Mason**.

Cancelled, filmed entirely in lockdown in a Spanish apartment on a mobile phone, has already amassed over 2.1 million views on Facebook and has picked up a suite of international awards including the Grand Jury Prize at Marseille WebFest and Best Series at British Web Awards.

The pandemic was still inspiring innovative sketch comedy ideas for content creators in December with Screen Australia supported series [War on 2020](#) striking a chord with audiences on Facebook, Twitter and YouTube. The ‘Contact Tracics’ episode released via all The Chaser’s social media platforms amassed over 2.6 million views to date.

Comparing the performance of online productions is difficult, as most online programs that Screen Australia funds are released on multiple platforms, including BVOD services (e.g. ABC iview), YouTube and Facebook, which all utilise different measures of a view.

The second series of [Meta Runner](#) has already amassed over 5 million views on YouTube, and follows on from the success of the first series, which was the most watched Screen Australia-funded online program released on YouTube in 2019.

Popular online series that also had YouTube releases in 2020 include Skip Ahead animated project [Rebooted](#) with over 3 million views, [Ding Dong I’m Gay](#) with 2.8 million views, and [2121](#) with over 1 million views.

Screen Australia supported two series released on Instagram TV in 2020: [Moments of Clarity](#) and [Love Bug](#). The agency also partnered with Snapchat on a development initiative to create an Australian vertical series for Snapchat and funded its first series for TikTok.

SCREEN AUSTRALIA 2021

“If last year taught us anything it is that the resilience of our screen industry is nothing short of exceptional. I’m immensely proud to be a part of a sector that through tenacity and generous support from the Federal Government has endured the challenges of the pandemic with dogged determination, perseverance and collaboration.”

“We know now what we are capable of despite all the hurdles COVID-19 continues to present and that we have the passion, skills and safety protocols in place to continue to make critically acclaimed, distinctive Australian stories that connect with audiences here and all over the world.”

In the most recent Budget, the Federal Government announced that from 1 July 2021, Screen Australia will receive an additional \$30 million over two years to support the production of Australian content. The agency has also received an additional \$3 million over three years to cultivate quality Australian screenwriting and script development. This is a huge increase in support

from the Government to Screen Australia and the focus for the first quarter of 2021 will be determining how to best utilise these funds to support the sector. Screen Australia will continue to work with the Minister, Department and broader industry on the previously announced series of reforms to the regulatory framework that underpins Australian content.

“While 2021 still has a degree of unpredictability I hope people can take comfort in knowing that Australian audiences will still be able to enjoy more *Bluey*; more world-class drama titles like *Total Control*, *Five Bedrooms* and *Bump* from their living room; more web series like *Superwog* and *Meta Runner* on their mobile or tablet; more uniquely Australian stories on the big screen with some of our biggest stars such as Eric Bana and Naomi Watts; and more opportunities to discover our next generation of local screen talent.”

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): 778, 788, 624, 709, 651, 608, 647, 554, 514, 443
- Top 10 Screen Australia funded documentaries (metro viewers 000s): 719, 715, 623, 489, 531, 480, 510, 398, 467, 375
- *Bluey* (metro viewers 000s): 8am: 387; 6.20pm: 1,248
- 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.