

Comment on Screen Australia draft program guidelines from Jonathan M. Shiff

Dear Screen Australia,

As a producer of children's and family television programming, there are two areas of the draft Guidelines I would like to comment on.

First, in relation to the development programs, I welcome the Enterprise Program and the recognition in the Guidelines of the need to support production companies and producers as businesses, as well as supporting individual projects.

Second, in relation to the children's television Guidelines, I am concerned with two elements in particular.

I note that the Guidelines propose only two rounds of funding per year, and more particularly propose these taking place in AUGUST and DECEMBER. Having the only funding for children's drama available within a narrow four month period and none for the balance of the year severely impacts on producers, and could mean the loss of projects that have the required market attachments but have to wait months before they can apply to Screen Australia for top-up funding. We would prefer to have more than two rounds per year, but if two rounds is the limit, then the August round should be brought back to July (as under previous arrangements).

Further, we are concerned with the statement that a subsequent series of children's drama would only be funded if the investment ask on Screen Australia was substantially less than for the first series. While we are certainly supportive of the aim that producers and productions become self-sustaining over time, practical experience indicates that no matter the children's producer's desire to achieve this or the success of the series, in the children's marketplace this is very difficult to achieve. In particular, the low licence fees payable for children's drama – an issue long recognised by Screen Australia and its predecessors – make it particularly difficult for this to be overcome. And even if international networks pre-buy a second or third series this typically only serves to reduce the amount of the distribution guarantee, rather than providing a genuine increase in funding available.

In this regard we also note that subsequent series of children's programs are at a significant disadvantage under the Producer Offset system. Because the Offset caps out at 65 episodes, regardless of length, it means that children's drama series – typically of 26 half hour episodes each – can only access the Offset for two and a half series, while adult drama can access the Offset for twice as much production.

The combination of this Offset cap, low local licence fees and a Guideline which requires a significant reduction in SA funding on any subsequent series even though simply by inflation costs increase with each series produced, is likely to mean that children's series increasingly become one-off events with no opportunity to build a brand or a successful

series which in turn has more opportunity to return funds to SA and help the producer build a self-sustaining business.

Regards,

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