

## ABA REVIEWS AUSTRALIAN CONTENT RULES FOR TV

The ABA began its review of the Australian content requirements for commercial television with the launch of a discussion paper presenting possible ways to strengthen the Australian presence on television.

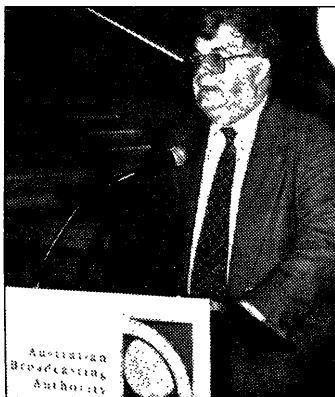
'Television, and commercial television in particular, is central to Australian popular culture and Australian content regulation has given Australian programs the chance to demonstrate their popularity and appeal to Australian audiences,' said ABA Chairman, Mr Brian Johns, in launching the paper.

'There is much to celebrate in the achievements of the Australian television industry in producing significantly high levels of Australian programming,' Mr Johns said. 'In perhaps no other of the Australian cultural industries has such a high level of Australian content been achieved with such widespread audience acceptance. The ABA intends to build on that achievement and to see how the current standard can be revised and if possible improved upon.'

The reform of the standard aims to position the Australian broadcasting industry in a changing and developing environment in a way that will ensure it remains competitive and responsive to audience needs.

'While a strong commitment to Australian culture and its representation on television is the foundation of the re-

view, the challenge is to come up with a standard that confronts the realities of convergence and globalisation,' said Mr Johns.



Brian Johns, launching the Australian Content discussion paper

'I would like to see Australia build on the tremendous talent and skill we have built up. Australia is well positioned to use this as a firm basis to become a world leader in new media.'

The Broadcasting Services Act requires the ABA to develop program standards relating to Australian content of programs

on commercial television. The present standard was inherited from the ABA's predecessor, the Australian Broadcasting Tribunal (ABT).

The ABA is seeking public comment on how it should revise the current standard or frame a new standard.

### AUSTRALIAN CONTENT STANDARD

The current Australian content requirements for commercial television are set out in Television Program Standard (TPS) 14 which was inherited by the ABA from the ABT. The review aims to ensure that the standard meets the objects of the Broadcasting Services Act and promotes the role of commercial television in developing and reflecting a sense of Australian identity, character and cultural diversity.

An Australian content standard is mandatory for commercial television licensees. The review is therefore not a re-examination of the principles underlying Australian content regulation. Rather, it will address the question of how the existing regulation can be revised or improved.

### DISCUSSION PAPER

The ABA has released a discussion paper and has invited submissions from the broadcasting and production industries, consumer groups, government agencies and the public. The paper is in three parts. Part 1 outlines the legal framework and places the review in the context of the rapidly developing broadcasting sector. Part 2 assesses the existing standard and compliance by the commercial networks since 1990. While all stations have complied with the



Tony Branigan, FACTS; Peter Webb, ABA; Sean O'Halloran, Seven network

standard, in some areas of its operation there appears to be room for improvement

The third part of the paper puts forward and requests comment on the following questions to be addressed in considering possible revisions to the

standard:

- **What definition of an 'Australian program' will provide flexibility to the industry while delivering programs that meet the cultural objects of the standard?**

In addressing this question possi-



Andrew Poole, ABA; Charles Williams, TEN; Keith Roache, TEN; Kay Wilkins ABA; Deborah Sims, ABA

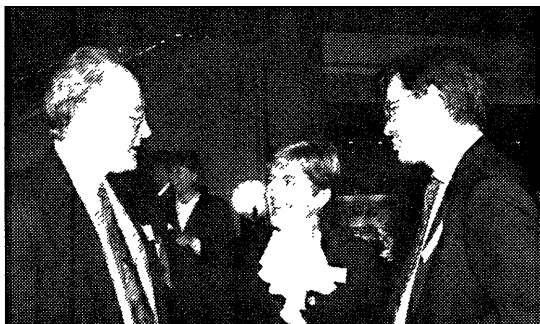
ABA Update

ISSN No. 1039-2750

EDITOR: ANNE HEWER

SUBSCRIPTIONS: \$36

FREQUENCY: 12 ISSUES PER ANNUM



Tony Branigan, FACTS; Debra Richards, ABA; Michael Gordon-Smith, SPAA

a special status under the Act, which reflects its ongoing importance in cultural and industry terms. The ABA recognises that successive reviews of Australian content have resulted in successive increases in the minimum amount of Australian drama required to be shown. Consideration is given as to whether the minimum should again be increased.

ble revisions could include making the possession of a certificate issued for the purposes of compliance with Division 10BA (and/or 10B) of the Income Tax Assessment Act qualification as an 'Australian Program' for the purpose of the standard. This would have the effect of automatically recognising 'official co-productions'.

For those programs that do not have such a certificate, the introduction of a more flexible creative elements test than the one in the present standard is considered. A further possible revision is according national status to New Zealand persons under the standard.

The mechanism that sets minimum levels is a scoring system which was intended to give broadcasters a certain degree of flexibility. The ABA recognises that the flexibility has not been achieved. Consideration is given to changes to the scoring system that would make it simpler to operate and recognise the realities of production and transmission that have applied since the current standard was introduced. Alternatively the scoring system could be replaced by a simple quota based on hours broadcast.

**- What amount of Australian children's drama should be required and how should it be measured?**

If there is one area of certainty about the necessity for revision it is in the area of children's programs. The ABA wants to ensure that children continue to be provided with reasonable amounts of Australian children's programs and in particular drama. Consideration

is given to whether the current drama minimum, which represents less than one per cent of all programs broadcast, should be increased. Consideration is also given to whether there should also be a requirement for minimum amounts of Australian preschool programs, something which is currently not required.

**- Should any other type of Australian programming be specifically recognised by the standard?**

The ABA accepts the need to revise the man-

ner in which other types of programs are encouraged under the present standard, if not to dispense altogether with this aspect of the standard. This is because the ABA's assessment of the present 'diversity' category strongly suggests this to have been the least successful aspect of the standard.

The ABA has also received representations from the Screen Producers Association of Australia and the Film Fi-



Brian Johns, ABA; Sean O'Halloran, Seven Network

nance Corporation that there should be specific encouragement for the transmission of new Australian documentary programs. Consideration is given to whether this is desirable within the current trends in non-fiction programming.

The ABA will create a public file which will include relevant information and any documents or submissions received by the review. The file will be available for inspection at the ABA's Sydney and Canberra offices.

**SUBMISSIONS**

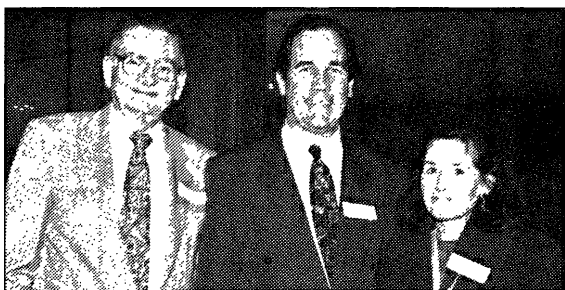
The closing date for submissions is Friday 2 September 1994.

Send submissions to:

Director Programs  
Australian Broadcasting Authority  
PO Box Q500

Queen Victoria Building NSW 2000

For copies of the discussion paper, call Andrew Poole, (02) 334 7845.



John Morris, Film Finance Corporation; Nick Herd, ABA; Maureen Barron, FFC

**- What is the appropriate level for a transmission quota?**

The current transmission quota is set at 50 per cent of all programs broadcast between 6.00 a.m. and 12 midnight. Consideration is given to the options of increasing the quota level, maintaining the existing level or extending the time band over which it applies. Consideration is also given to whether the transmission quota could be used as a mechanism to target particular program types.

**- What amount of Australian drama programming should be required and how should it be measured?**

Australian drama programming has



Gareth Grainger, ABA; Hilary McPhee, Australia Council; Bob Campbell, Seven Network