

ABA PROPOSES CHANGES TO LEVELS OF AUSTRALIAN CONTENT ON TV

The ABA has proposed changes to the program standard which governs Australian content on commercial television.

The ABA is seeking to significantly increase the amount of quality Australian children's drama stations are required to show, from 16 to 32 hours per year.

Fifty per cent of the annual requirement for preschool programs should be first release Australian programming, the ABA feels.

It has also flagged the introduction of a quota for new Australian documentaries of ten hours per year.

An increase in the overall transmission quota for Australian programs from 50 to 55 per cent over the next three years is proposed.

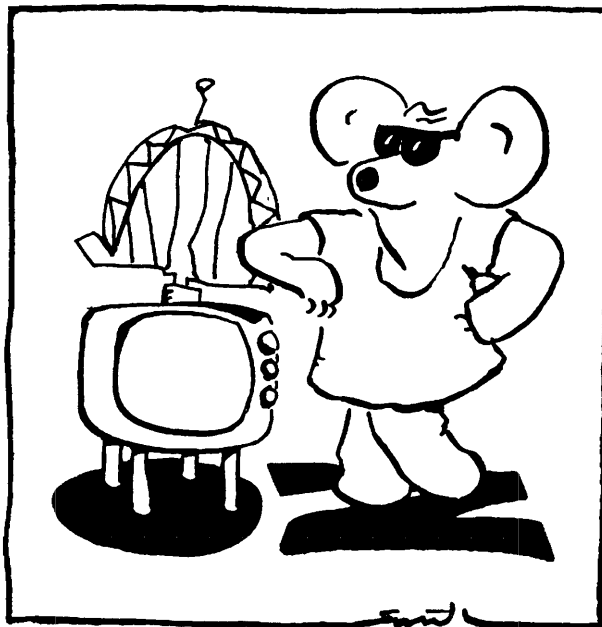
The ABA has also asked the broadcasting and production industries to focus on Australian drama and how it should be measured.

'The Australian content regulations have helped create one of the best television systems in the world,' said Mr Brian Johns, ABA Chairman. 'Their importance is recognised by all in the industry, including the television networks.'

'The changes we are proposing will lift the amount of Australian programs over the next three years, with programs funded by the Government's *Creative Nation* initiative being a further add-on,' he said. 'Looking down the track, I am confident that Australian viewers will be among the big winners.'

The ABA's proposals are contained in a working paper released today as part of a review of current Australian content rules. The paper will form the basis of further discussions with producers, broadcasters and other interested parties next month.

The ABA released a discussion paper in July this year and has consulted widely and sought submissions on its contents. As well as containing firm proposals, the working paper draws out some of the major issues raised in meetings and submissions. The major unre-



solved issue relates to the level of Australian drama for commercial television.

In a submission, the Federation of Australian Commercial Television Stations (FACTS), representing broadcasters, strongly argued that there should not be a quota system for Australian drama as this simply creates an imperative to mass-produce programs.

The ABA is of the view Australian drama is a key element of an Australian content standard and rejects the arguments of FACTS about its regulatory status. However, the ABA wishes to consult further on the actual amount the standard should require.

In flagging an increase in overall transmission quota from 50 to 55 per cent, the ABA has been mindful of the new broadcasting environment and the programming strategies, including increased levels of Australian programs, the television networks are putting in place to deal with it.

In addition, the ABA noted that the average level of Australian programs broadcast by the commercial television as a whole was 56 per cent in 1992.

'The list of major sports events which cannot be siphoned off to pay TV, prohibition of advertising on pay TV until 1997 and the Government's television production fund are all measures which will

assist the free-to-air television industry meet the challenges of increased competition,' Mr Johns said. 'The ABA is of the view that it is not unreasonable to ask the industry to pass on some of the benefits resulting from these measures to viewers in the form of increased levels of Australian programming.'

The ABA is aiming to release a final draft of the revised Australian content standard in January 1995.

REVIEW

In its review of the Australian content standards for commercial television, the ABA has consulted widely and also considered submissions made in response to a discussion paper released in July 1994.

The discussion paper set out a series of questions for comment by submitters. The questions focussed on the definition of an 'Australian program', the appropriate level for a transmission quota, the amount of Australian adult and children's drama and how these should be measured, and, finally, whether or not there are other program types which should be specifically recognised by the standard.

The ABA has considered the 53 submissions received, and has reached a number of preliminary conclusions about the way an Australian content standard could be structured.

In relation to the definition of an Australian program, the ABA is of the view that programs which possess a certificate issued under Division 10BA of the Income Tax Assessment Act should qualify as an Australian program under the ABA's program standard. Non-10BA programs should comply with a simplified creative elements test.

The ABA has also come to the conclusion that there is a real legal impediment to the recognition of New Zealand persons and programs in the standard. As a result of advice from counsel, the ABA now takes the view that it would be

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beyond its legal powers to include New Zealand programs in the Australian content standard.

The ABA believes the current transmission quota should be increased to 55 per cent, to be achieved at the conclusion of a three year period. The measurement period should be extended to conclude at 2 a.m. in some circumstances.

The ABA is proposing to abolish the current diversity provisions in the standard, but introduce a quota for new Australian documentaries of ten hours per year. Social documentaries is one of the categories included in the diversity provisions of the current standard.

There was strong support for the proposition that the amount of Australian C Drama broadcast should be increased. The ABA proposes the amount should be increased from the current 16 hours per year to 32 hours per year. This increase should be introduced incrementally over a period of three years.

In addition, the ABA believes that 50 per cent of P programs (programs made specially for preschool children) broadcast during a year should be Australian. Stations are required to broadcast 130 hours of P programs per year, but there is no current requirement that these be Australian.

In its July discussion paper, the ABA posed the question: What amount of Australian drama programming should be required and how should it be measured?

Some submitters argued for increased levels of 'high end' drama (mini-series and telemovies).

The ABA has drawn up two models, for further consideration and to provide a focus for discussion at meetings to be held in early December.

The first of these models is one based on a quota of hours broadcast per year. The ABA has nominated a figure of 150 hours as one that could be most realistically achieved by each of the three networks.

The second model is based on a revision of the points system in the current standard.

TIMETABLE FOR THE REVIEW

The ABA considers that there is a need for further discussion, particularly of the questions

- What amount of Australian drama should be required?
- How should the level of drama be measured?

It is planned to hold further meetings in Sydney and Melbourne with interested parties in December. The meetings will discuss the proposals set out in the paper, with the aim of gathering information on their potential impact.

For those unable to attend the Sydney or Melbourne meetings, the ABA will accept written comment. This should be received at the ABA's Sydney office by close of business 6 January 1995.

It is anticipated that, following consideration of comments made during these meetings, and of any written comment made by those unable to attend the meetings, the ABA would be able to release a final draft of the revised Australian content standard by early in 1995. □

CONSULTATION COOL FOR KIDS

'Cool' or 'Gross': Children's Attitudes to Violence, Kissing and Swearing on Television was published by the ABA in October 1994. It examined what concerns, bothers or upsets children about what they see on television and the degree to which rules and routines relating to television exist in the home. The quantitative stage involved surveying children in the state, Catholic and independent school systems.

Many organisations were consulted as part of the public consultation process for the development strategy of the Kids and Classification Research program. Their approval to conduct research in schools was also sought. These organisations included: the Department of School Education and specifically the State Education Research Applications Committee (Quality Assurance Directorate); the Catholic Education Commission and Sydney Diocese; and the Federation of Parents and Citizens' Associations of New South Wales.

These organisations were involved

throughout all stages of the research project, from the initial questionnaire design stage through to the final briefings on the results. As part of the consultation process before the release of the monograph, results were communicated to the Department of School Education, the Catholic Education Commission and the Sydney Catholic Diocese. In addition industry consultation occurred with the Federation of Australian Commercial Television Stations by way of briefing of topline results.

Since the release of *Cool or Gross* the ABA's Director of Programs, Ms Lesley Osborne, and the Research Manager, Ms Linda Sheldon, have met with Dr Terry Burke, NSW Education Department's Deputy Director-General, Learning and Teaching, to discuss the implications of the research for schools and to begin the consultation process on the second stage of the children's research on what children like about the television shows they watch. This consultation will also include producers and writers of children's shows. □

