



The ABA has released for public comment a draft program standard in which it proposes to increase the amount of Australian content on commercial television.

ABA releases proposed oz content standard

The ABA's Australian content proposals have been developed after extensive consultation with broadcasters, program makers and consumer groups about how to ensure the continuing achievement of high levels of Australian content on commercial television.

'The ABA has two ambitions for the new standard. That for audiences it will help confirm Australia's sense of identity, character and cultural diversity, and that it will assist the television industry both economically and structurally,' said ABA Chairman Mr Peter Webb.

'The Australian television industry has a very good record of achievement in producing high levels of Australian programming which is deeply valued by Australian audiences.'

The proposed increase in the total amount of Australian content on commercial television, from the current minimum level of 50 up to 55 per cent, would be introduced from the beginning of 1998.

'The Australian audience in general will benefit, but young children and their parents will be the big winners,' he said.

As well as the amount of quality first run Australian children's drama doubling to 32 hours per year for each station, there is a new requirement for an additional eight hours of repeat material.

The increased quota for first release children's drama will be introduced in stages, with 24 hours required in 1996, 28 hours in 1997 and 32 hours in 1998.

The proposed standard also requires the quota for pre-school programs (a minimum of 130 hours per year) to be met by Australian programs to ensure Australian pre-school children continue to have ac-



Peter Webb announcing the proposed new Australian content standard

Highlights of the proposed standard:

- an increase in the minimum amount of Australian content shown by the commercial television networks from 50 to 55 per cent of transmission time annually;
- a doubling of the amount of quality first-release children's drama to be broadcast, from 16 to 32 hours annually,
- a new requirement for the quota for pre-school children's programs to be met by Australian programs;
- a new requirement for 10 hours annually of new Australian documentaries; and
- a simplified measurement system which will guarantee the current minimum levels of new Australian drama.

Copies of the proposed standard are available from the ABA, phone: (02) 334 7881.

Written comments should be lodged by the close of business, 21 July 1995 and should be addressed to:

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cess to Australian programs made specifically for them.

The ABA's proposal for a quota of 10 hours annually for new Australian documentaries is aimed at ensuring that documentaries have a place in commercial television schedules. 'Infotainment is popular, but viewers also appreciate programming which explores important questions in depth,' said Mr Webb.

New Australian drama continues to be encouraged in the proposed standard. The ABA has maintained the current minimum levels for first release Australian drama, but made the proposed standard simpler and more flexible to use in meeting these levels, said Mr Webb.

The simplified standard allows each network the flexibility to choose a mixture of drama formats to meet the overall requirement.

The assessment of whether

a program is Australian, for the purpose of the standard, has been made more flexible and is now consistent with the requirements of production financing.

This approach was supported by broadcasters and producers during extensive consultation undertaken by the ABA.

The ABA is seeking comment from the general public and the industry on the proposed standard by Friday, 21 July 1995. Copies of the proposed standard (with explanatory notes) are available from the ABA.

Following consideration of the comments received, the ABA plans to determine the final version of the standard in August 1995.

The new standard will come into effect on 1 January 1996. This will allow licensees time to plan their programming so as to meet the increased



Australian content requirements.

Review of the standard

The release of the proposed standard represents the final stage of the review of the Australian content rules for commercial television. The

Outline of the proposal

■ An increase in the minimum level of Australian content, to 55 per cent of transmission time between 6.00 a.m. and 12 midnight to be achieved by 1998.

■ Doubling the amount of quality, first-release children's

tion will commission new Australian drama programs of high quality, but those programs will not count for the purpose of the standard.

■ Simplifying the definition of an Australian program so it provides greater flexibility and is more consistent with the requirements of production financing.

Programs which possess a certificate issued under Division 10BA of the Income Tax Assessment Act (such as telemovies, mini-series and some documentaries) will automatically qualify as an Australian program under the ABA's program standard. Other programs meet a simplified test of the Australian creative elements involved in their production.

The definition of Australian,

hour during C (children's) drama shown between 6.00 p.m. and 8.30 p.m. This reflects the need to ensure that networks will be able to generate sufficient revenue to support improved programming for children.

Further industry and audience considerations

The proposed standard is built upon the widely recognised positive aspects of the current standard and introduces a new simplicity and flexibility to the regulation of Australian content.

The ABA believes the levels proposed are achievable by commercial television broadcasters within the time frames suggested and take account of



Launching the proposed standard and explaining the finer details

ABA began its review in July 1994.

The *Broadcasting Services Act 1992* requires that all commercial television broadcasters comply with the standard determined by the ABA for the Australian content of programs.

The Act also imposes a duty on the ABA to determine such a standard. The ABA is reviewing the standard it inherited from its predecessor, the Australian Broadcasting Tribunal.

The ABA consulted widely with broadcasters, producers, writers, actors and consumer groups and published a number of papers outlining proposals for change. The ABA also considered 85 written submissions received. The proposed standard represents the result of this consultation and the ABA's consideration of the views it heard.

drama programs to be broadcast. As a result each station will be required to broadcast 32 hours of first run Australian children's drama by 1998.

■ A new requirement for the quota for pre-school children's programs to be met by Australian made programs.

■ A new requirement for 10 hours a year of new Australian documentaries to provide an opportunity for a greater diversity in the approach to the presentation of information.

■ Maintaining the current minimum level of new Australian drama. The current method of measuring compliance through a points scoring system is modified to make it more simple to use, while ensuring the greatest possible flexibility in meeting the standard with a variety of drama formats.

In addition, the Commercial Television Production Fund established under Creative Na-



for the purposes of the proposed standard, will not include programming produced by New Zealanders. Despite the Closer Economic Relations (CER), the ABA has received legal advice that it cannot include New Zealand programming in an Australian content standard.

The ABA has removed a disincentive to quality children's drama being shown in prime time, by increasing the amount of non-program matter (advertising and promotions) from 12 to 13 minutes per

their capacity to meet the standard.

Audiences will be assured of the continuing and increasing availability of Australian programming on commercial television, with children having access to a dramatically increased amount of quality programming.

Program producers, writers, directors, actors and other members of the Australian creative community will continue to find in the commercial television sector a thriving outlet for their creativity. □