



The ABA's review of the Australian content standard is nearing completion — the ABA expects to determine the new Australian content standard this month.

Australian content standard for television nears completion

The ABA released a revised draft standard for comment and consultation in August.

Earlier proposals to allow Australian drama programs first broadcast on the ABC or SBS to earn first-run points for commercial broadcasters will not proceed under the revised draft.

The ABA's decision follows consideration of submissions received to date in relation to the draft Australian content standard for commercial television.

'During this consultation period we've met with and listened to all the parties with an interest in the standard and it is clear that those opposed to the ABC/SBS issue are very fearful of its capacity to dilute the drama quota, while those supporting it feel it will be of limited benefit. The ABA has decided not to proceed with the proposal,' said Mr Webb, ABA Chairman.

Changes to earlier draft

The ABA made a number of other changes to the draft standard as a result of suggestions advanced in submissions. These include:

- programs funded under Creative Nation's Commercial Television Production Fund will not be counted towards a licensee's obligations under the proposed standard. How-

ever, the ABA has clarified that such programs will not be grouped with foreign programs for the purposes of the transmission quota;

- in order to avoid a diminution in the requirements of the drama quota, sketch comedy will not count; and
- feature films can be shown on free-to-air television and earn first run points even though they have been previously shown on pay TV.

Several industry recommendations on drafting have been accepted so as to strengthen the definitions of Australian programs under the standard and further reinforce Australian cultural identity.

ABA's role

One of the ABA's functions is to regulate the level of Australian content of programs broadcast by commercial television licensees. The ABA is

required, under the *Broadcasting Services Act 1992*, to determine a standard for commercial television that relates to the Australian content of programs.

The ABA inherited an Australian content standard for commercial television that had been determined by the Australian Broadcasting Tribunal in 1989. This standard has remained in force since the ABA came into existence in October 1992.

The ABA has a duty to review that standard and announced early in its existence that it would examine the Australian content issue. The ABA encouraged people to come forward with ideas about Australian content and how it could be encouraged.

Many industry groups, organisations and individuals offered ideas about how greater levels of Australian content could be achieved.

The ABA listened to these ideas.

Review process

In July 1994 the ABA announced a formal review of the current standard applying to commercial television. The ABA issued a discussion paper which contained a range of ideas it had gathered in the previous discussions with broadcasters and industry representatives.

In November 1994 the ABA issued a working paper and held public meetings with interested parties to discuss issues in the working paper.

The ABA received a large number of submissions from broadcasters and industry representatives in response to both papers.

The ABA issued a draft of the proposed standard in June 1995 and emphasised that it was a draft issued for consultation. Written comment was invited as was discussion of the draft standard by the key industry groups, individual broadcasters and producers.

The revised draft standard is based on the comments received and comment invited from wide consultation.

Final comment on the revised draft closed on 21 August. One issue which has received renewed support from broadcasters and the production industry is the inclusion of sketch comedy in the definition of drama. □