

Children's Television

The history of regulation of children's programming in Australia has essentially been a response to a lack of Australian produced, good quality, age-specific programs for children on commercial television and a concern to protect the interests of children. **Liz Gilchrist** and **Josie Tomas** of the ABA's Children's Television section examine the background to the standards.

Standards

A brief history

The quality of children's programming on commercial television has been a major issue since the start of television in Australia.

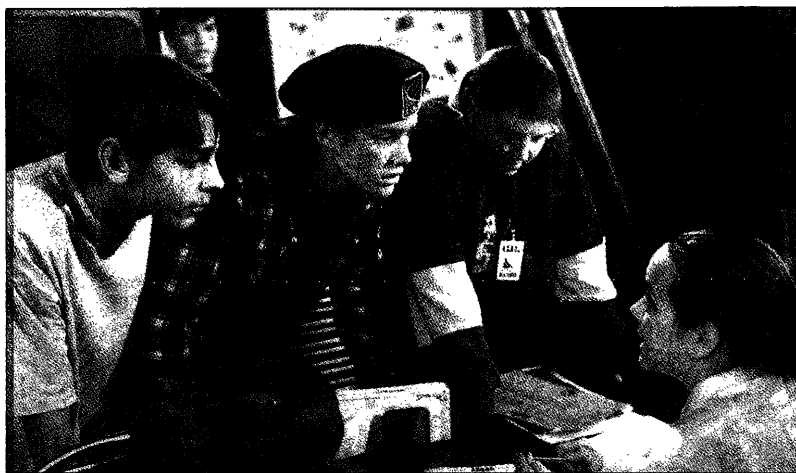
It was addressed by the former Australian Broadcasting Tribunal in its 1977 Self Regulation

Australian children's drama to be broadcast each year, and required a minimum of 30 minutes of preschool programs to be broadcast each week-day. At the time the standards were introduced, the Tribunal gave an assurance that they would be reviewed after two years. This review commenced in February 1987.

The current children's television standards (CTS) came into effect from 1 January 1990. The objective of the CTS is that:

Children should have access to a variety of quality television programs made specifically for them, including Australian drama and non-drama programs.

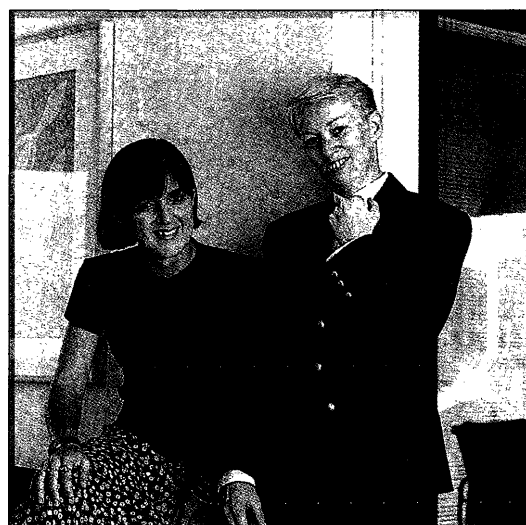
The CTS oblige commercial television licensees to broadcast minimum annual quotas (equivalent to approximately one hour per day) of pre-classified children's programs. Each commercial broadcaster is required to show at least 390 hours of classified children's programs per year. Of this, 260 hours must be classified C (130 hours per year of which must be first release Australian made programs, including 16 hours of C Australian drama) and 130 hours must be P classified programs. The ABA is currently reviewing the



From 'Ship to Shore',
courtesy Barron
Entertainment Ltd

Inquiry. The report of that inquiry heralded a continuing commitment by the Tribunal to children's television. In 1979 the C classification, C time and the Children's Program Committee (CPC) were introduced to improve the quality and increase the quantity of children's programs. These initiatives were the basis of the regulatory framework of the children's and preschool children's television standards introduced by the Tribunal in 1984.

These standards were implemented following extensive public consultation and with input from the Children's Program Committee. The standards clarified and extended the rules introduced by the Tribunal in 1979. They set out criteria for C classification, required that each year 50 per cent of C programs should be first release Australian programs, limited the repetition of programs, limited advertising during C time, required a minimum of eight hours of new



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C Programs—Ratings for Sydney and Melbourne			
Survey period: 2-29 October 1994			
PROGRAM	NETWORK	SYDNEY	MELBOURNE
		%	%
Halfway Across the Galaxy and Turn Left (Sun)	7	3	8
Ocean Girl (Mon)	10	1	4
Ship to Shore 2 (Mon - Wed)	9	4	5
Totally Wild (Mon - Fri)	10	4	4
Good Sports (Sat)	9	1	2
Total Recall (Mon - Fri)	7	3	4

Child Audience: 5 - 12 years	Potential child audience in 1994:		
Source: Nielsen Media Research	Sydney	404 000	
	Melbourne	367 000	

viewing the Australian Content Standard (TPS) 14 and this is likely to result in a substantial increase in Australian drama programs for children.

The CTS require that programs be classified by the regulatory authority before they are put to air. Before 1992, these programs were classified by the Tribunal, following assessment by the CPC. In March 1992, the Tribunal changed the way it assessed and classified children's programs. The CPC was disbanded by the Tribunal and new assessment procedures were adopted. The new procedures were based on staff assessment and the use of specialist consultants.

C and P requirements

To be classified C or P by the ABA, programs are required to meet the following criteria, which are set out in CTS 2. The programs must:

- a) be made specifically for children;
- b) be entertaining;
- c) be well produced (script, direction, production, etc.);
- d) add something to a child's understanding and experience; and
- e) be relevant for Australian children.

When the ABA was created by the *Broadcasting Services Act 1992* in October 1992, the accompanying *Broadcasting Services (Transitional Provisions and Consequential Amendments) Act 1992* carried over the existing standards for administration by the ABA. The ABA has continued the assessment and classification procedures which were in place when it took over from the Tribunal.

The ABA has a direct role in children's programming on Australian commercial television through the administration of the CTS. These standards have been successful in ensuring that children are provided with quality television programs that are made specifically for them. The CTS also embody a commitment to the protection of children from material that may be harmful to them.

A number of critically acclaimed and award winning Australian programs are screened and rate well. The table above outlines the ratings of a randomly selected month in 1994 of C time viewing. In October 1994, the program 'Halfway Across the Galaxy and Turn Left' achieved the highest ratings in the 5 to 12 years age group. (See p. 31 for the list of programs most recently classified by the ABA.)

From 'Ocean Girl', courtesy Jonathan M Shiff Productions.

