



Children's Television

their children to be challenged and entertained. They want their curiosity picqued and their horizons extended. Drama is one way that this can be done.

On that front the ABA is moving to the final stages of its review of the Australian content standard for commercial television.

We will publish a draft standard for the purposes of consultation early in April.

New rules

By 1998 each commercial television service will be required to broadcast 40 hours of Australian children's drama programs each year — including 32 hours of new Australian drama. The present requirement is effectively 16 hours per year.

So the ABA has decided to double the amount of top-class children's Australian drama over the next three years. The increased quota is presently designed to be introduced in stages, with 24 hours of first release 'C' drama required in 1996 and 28 hours in 1997. The new requirement for at least 8 hours of repeat Australian 'C' drama will begin in 1996.

The ABA's proposal to double the children's Australian drama quota may not provide the complete answer to questions about critical mass and industry sustainability, but it does provide a significant part of the answer.

The greatest comfort of all will probably be taken from this announcement by Australian parents, who want to be reassured that their children can have access to quality programming so that they can see themselves, their lives, their environment, and their national identity looking back at them.

The changes offer the Australian child audience the promise of more high quality television drama, the local production industry more scope to achieve the critical mass necessary to be a player in the globalised, convergent future, and the broadcast industry opportunities both to share these opportunities with the production industry and to play their part in challenging and engaging the adult audience of the future. □

The regulator's session at the World Summit on Television and Children, provided a forum for discussion on the differing regulatory models in the USA, UK, Canada and Australia. **Liz Gilchrist** of the ABA's Children's Television section reports on the discussion.

Regulation - alternative models

Similarities and differences in regulation were soon apparent in the session. The USA, Canada and Australia have legislative requirements for the provision of programs for children and Australia and Canada have content requirements for local production.

Commissioner Rachelle Chong, of the Federal Communications Commission (FCC) said the question of children's television in the USA was at 'the forefront of the FCC's agenda'. The FCC had to consider the delicate balance between the desire to protect the availability of children's programs and the right to free speech. This, she said, was further complicated by the 'advertiser supported commercial television market'. The FCC is looking at options on how to encourage broadcasters to provide better children's programming.

Lady Howe, Chairman, Broadcasting Standards Council (BSC), described the UK regulation as a 'light touch' commercial approach.

The BSC has an independent, advisory capacity for the whole of the UK broadcasting industry. It monitors programs, including satellite programs, and under-

takes research in areas of public concern. Lady Howe commented that whilst there were more children's programs on television in the UK, variety in the subject matter had reduced significantly.

Lady Howe and Commissioner Chong both called for audiences to take a more active role in the policy process and to bring pressure to bear on program providers to provide better programming for children.

Lady Howe also saw research as necessary to gain insights into children as viewers and to gauge the effects of television on them. The development of media education would enable viewers to interpret and understand the messages being directed to them and their children. Teaching the public would give them the 'means of travelling the information super highway'.

Peter Webb, Acting Chairman ABA, foreshadowed the proposed increase in the requirements for children's Australian drama in the ABA's review of the Australian content standard. He stated

L-R: Peter Webb, ABA Acting Chairman, Lady Howe and Colin Shaw from the Broadcasting Standards Council (UK) and Tim O'Keefe, ABA member





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that whilst the increase may not provide the complete answer 'to critical mass and increased sustainability', it provides a 'significant part of the answer'. (See p.11 for extracts from Peter Webb's address.)

Arthur Prober, Executive director, Entertainment Software Rating Board (ESRB), discussed 'a practical model for self-regulation', the ESRB industry model. The role of the ESRB is not to 'act as a censor or dictate taste' but to provide



Tim O'Keefe, ABA member and Naohiro Kato, of the Asia Pacific Broadcasting Union, at the Summit.

effective publications to allow consumers of interactive software to make educated, informed choices in purchasing software and allow parents to make effective decisions about the products they want in their homes.

The ESRB classification system uses rating code icons which provide information on the age appropriateness of the product, content descriptions and the skill requirements. The system was set up to provide reliable procedures and information to consumers and at the same time enable the interactive software industry to 'get product on the shelves'. Mr Prober considers the ESRB helps restore control to the consumer by providing the information to make informed decisions. He concluded by stating that self-regulation can work if the industry and the consumer 'can come together to define parameters and goals to build a structure that can benefit all'.

Commissioner Peter Senchuk, Canadian Radio Television and Telecommunications Commission (CRTC) concentrated on the Canadian cable produc-

tion fund which will allocate 80 per cent of its annual budget to the production of drama and children's programs. The CRTC has, through the licence renewal process, attempted to increase the levels of children's programming in Canada which has resulted in a decrease in American programs. The CRTC has also licensed speciality services catering for children, and this has seen an increase in excellent Canadian and foreign programming for children.

Much of the funding for children's programming in Canada comes from private funds and additional funding comes from the 10 per cent added to the purchase price of licences. The CRTC aims to 'keep Canada on its television screens by offering viewers high quality television productions' by means of the Canadian cable production fund. This was created from funds the companies were to return

to their subscribers in 1995 and beyond. Cable companies were able to retain 50 per cent and remit the other 50 per cent to the fund. The funds are market driven, with no value judgements being made on scripts or requiring the reduction of overheads.

Commissioner Senchuk also discussed the development of V-chip technology, designed to detect classification codes imbedded in the television signals for each program, as part of the CRTC's commitment to reduce violence on television. He concluded by saying the system of regulation in Canada placed it

well to serve the interests of children and placed its producers well in the world market.

Dale Kunkel, Department of Communication, University of California, USA, concluded the session by suggesting that government regulation, self regulation and consumer education all have a role to play in the delivery of programs to the child audience. He considers that these three models are complementary and neither one by itself 'holds the answer to any of our difficulties or shortcomings in the area of television services for children'.

Mr Kunkel suggested three areas to focus the regulatory debate. They are: the adequacy of television services to children; adverse effects of media content; and fairness of television persuasion.

He acknowledged the problems for regulators in these areas and agreed with Mark Armstrong of the ABC who chaired the session that there are no easy answers.

Dale Kunkel concluded with:

where there is a will there is a way, and clarity and vision are needed rather than great detail. People here have brought with them goodwill and a good sense of the value of our children. As long as we take with us the desire to serve our children well and not get caught up with the detail, things will get better in children's television'. ☐

L-R: At the Summit: Pat Manser ABA, Dina Browne Seven Network, Barbara Biggins Young Media Australia, and Lesley Osborne ABA.

