

News

Television

Four out of 16 pay TV drama channels complied with the requirement to spend 10 per cent of their annual program expenditure on new Australian drama in 1997-98, according to the Australian Broadcasting Authority (ABA). Seven channels spent between 0.4 per cent and 5.5 per cent of their total program expenditure on new Australian drama and four spent nothing. The Disney Channel, Nickelodeon and the comedy channel exceeded the 10 per cent minimum expenditure and Arena met the requirement. Together the four accounted for 63 per cent of total expenditure on new Australian drama.

Total program expenditure by the predominantly drama channels for the year ending June 30, 1998 was A\$100,806,940, of which \$8,173,504 was spent on new Australian drama. For the 1996-97 year, a total of \$3,242,754 was spent on new Australian drama.

New legislation is reportedly expected to be introduced into parliament before the end of June to enforce the 10 per cent minimum.

Transmission

NTL Australia has taken over the operation of the National Transmission Network, following its purchase of NTN in April for \$650 million.

The contractual arrange-

ments entered into with NTL guarantee a continuation of all existing services at current levels of service, providing protection for community broadcasters, emergency service operators, self-help transmission groups and commercial broadcasters in remote areas who use NTN facilities.

NTL will establish a \$5 million regional communications partnership with commonwealth, state and territory governments and the national broadcasters to be used to provide and/or upgrade network infrastructure in regional and rural Australia.

The ABC and SBS will be directly funded from the budget for the cost of their transmission services.

Telecommunications

THE government has proposed amendments to telecommunications legislation, particularly with concern to competition and arbitration.

The amendments relating to the competition notice provisions will:

- clarify the effects test for anti-competitive conduct;
- reduce the threshold for issuing a competition notice;
- simplify the drafting and variation of competition notices;
- make it harder for recipients to evade notices by slightly modifying their

conduct;

- enable the ACCC to suggest alternative conduct; and
- reduce incentives for appealing against notices.

Those relating to arbitration will:

- enable the ACCC to quickly issue interim access determinations;
- back-date final determinations;
- reduce incentives for appealing against determinations; and
- ensure Commissioners cannot be disqualified from arbitration.

The amendments in full are available from the Department of Communications, Information Technology and the Arts' website, www.dcita.gov.au

Film exhibition and distribution

ACCORDING to the Australian Competition and Consumer Commission (ACCC), complaints over film exhibition and distribution arrangements have fallen by up to 400 percent since the launch of an industry code of practice in August 1998.

An ACCC spokesman said that the number of complaints had fallen from about 30 to almost none. In the past 10 months, 15 cases had been brought to the attention of the code

conciliator. One had required resolution through conciliation, nine had been resolved and six were still under discussion.

Information technology

AN Australian Bureau of Statistics report has found that 16 per cent of all households (1.1 million) had home Internet access in 1998, an increase of almost 280 per cent over the 1996 figure of 286,000 households. The ACT had the highest proportion of online households (28 per cent) followed by New South Wales (18 per cent) and the Northern Territory (16 per cent), Victoria, Queensland and Western Australia (about 15 per cent each), South Australia (13 per cent) and Tasmania (10 per cent).

In 1998, 45 per cent of Australian households (three million) had a home computer and 38 per cent (2.6 million) had a computer which was used frequently. Almost 5.7 million Australians aged five years and over used a home computer frequently (34 per cent of the total population).

The figures translate into more than eight million adults using a computer from any site in 1998 and more than four million adults accessing the Internet in the same year. Work and home were the most frequently reported sites from which to use a computer or access the Internet.