

## Australian Screens, Australian Stories!

The Australian Writers Guild is calling on everyone working in the Australian TV and film industries to speak with one voice to protect Australian stories amidst the explosion of online streaming services such as Netflix.

President of AWG Jan Sardi says that while the expansion of digital streaming services in Australia is good for consumers of TV drama and comedy, it also means a further splintering of local audiences across multiple platforms - free-to-air broadcast, subscription television and the Internet - and has important implications for the local film and TV industry.



Jan says the AWG is committed to working with the other industry guilds and organisations to have one voice in a joint national campaign to protect Australian stories.

He points out that since the late 1960s, local content quotas have ensured that Australian commercial free-to-air broadcasters have commissioned and screened locally produced comedy, drama and children's programs.

"These quotas have been the bedrock on which the Australian film and TV industry has stood for almost fifty years, sustaining a critical mass of writers, directors, producers and crew," he says. "Without the quotas established by John Gorton's Liberal Country Party government there would be no industry today."

When subscription television arrived in Australia, the Australian Writers Guild secured a commitment from the subscription TV providers Foxtel and Optus to invest 10 per cent of their comedy and drama budgets in local content.

"This led to many very successful comedies and dramas on the subscription platform," Jan says.

"As yet, the new digital streaming companies have made no commitment to invest in the production of local content. Once again, the AWG is actively lobbying to ensure this investment occurs."

The AWG recognises that because Netflix, Stan and Presto provide their content on digital platforms, in some cases from the USA, it is difficult to enforce content quotas similar to those that apply to the domestic commercial free-to-air broadcasters. However, the Guild believes there are numerous other ways in which local investment from such companies can be secured, as evidenced by the current federal government's push to levy GST on international online purchases. The media convergence review, commissioned by the Labor government and released in 2012, outlined a number of such strategies though the current government is still yet to comment on the review.

The AWG believes that before any investment strategies are decided, the industry requires a commitment from government to address the issue.

The Guild is actively committed to bringing industry stakeholders together to demonstrate to government the urgent need to address the issue of local investment from online providers, even though this could take a lot of time and effort.

AWG President Jan Sardi adds: “In the meantime, I would urge everyone to write to their local federal member and remind him or her that this is a vital issue which relates to the very survival of the Australian film and TV industry.”

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