

# National Cultural Policy Submission

## SUBMISSION FOR REVIEW OF AUSTRALIA'S NATIONAL CULTURAL POLICY

by JONATHAN J. SEQUEIRA

I am the producer of three feature film documentaries, and have been part of the screen industry for the last twenty five years. My professional career also includes time over ten years at the ABC (4 Corners, Message Stick, Triple JTV), and a multitude of music videos and short films.

My most recognised film, as both director and producer, is *Descent into the Maelstrom – the Radio Birdman Story* which was praised in parliament by our current Prime Minister, the Hon Anthony Albanese.

I write this submission with a focus on the role of the Australian Broadcasting Corporation and its role in shaping Australia's culture, both music and art.

This submission proposes the following actions to help nurture and promote Australian culture and art:

1. Amend the ABC charter to require 90% Australian content.
2. Provide financial incentives to cinemas for screening Australian films.

### 1. AMEND THE ABC CHARTER TO REQUIRE 90% AUSTRALIAN CONTENT

INCREASING AUSTRALIAN CONTENT ON THE ABC WILL NOT AFFECT THEIR BUDGET. IT IS COST NEUTRAL.

I refer you to this article on the difficulties faced in getting Australian screen content to the ABC. My own experiences echo this, and I was informed by ABC Head of Acquisitions that the ABC reserves timeslots for foreign content.

<https://www.smh.com.au/entertainment/tv-and-radio/from-mabo-to-frackman-how-national-broadcasters-are-letting-us-down-20190612-p51wt1.html>

The ABC is Australia's premiere cultural institution. What it presents shapes how we perceive Australian art and culture.

At present, ABC TV broadcasts less than 50% Australian content (excluding News/Caff) during the peak hours of 7.30pm and midnight.

Much of the content is from wealthy US and UK companies.

In the digital age, this content is generally available on commercial multi-channels (9 Gem, 7 Flix etc) or on streaming services (Britbox etc).

While ABC produced content cost around \$160,000 per hour, ACQUIRED CONTENT, such as BBC programs, cost around \$10,000 per hour.

The ABC can replace the ACQUIRED BBC/US content with ACQUIRED Australian content for the SAME PRICE.

There is a surfeit of independent quality Australian screen content. Award winning films and documentaries that struggle for an audience due to lack of marketing budget.

ABC Radio is in a similar position, one that is even easier to fix.

Triple J plays only approximately 50% Australian music.

The remaining 50% is predominantly wealthy megastars from the US and the UK.

All royalties and fees go overseas to these artists and the huge parent companies.

I believe that a 90% Australian quota provides enough space to fulfil overseas needs and relevance.

#### EFFECT OF OVERSEAS CONTENT ON AUSTRALIAN CULTURE

What the ABC presents provides a blueprint for how Australian's should view their own culture.

By minimising Australian screen and music content, the ABC sends the wrong signal to the public - that Australian culture is of secondary importance, and is not a PRIORITY.

I believe the ABC should make Australian music and arts the NORM.

We have SBS to provide foreign content.

#### PROPOSAL

- amend the ABC Charter to commit to a minimum of 90% Australian content
- replace foreign acquired content with Australian acquired content at the same price. This does not have to be like for like. E.g. an Australian documentary can replace a UK period drama
- 90% Australian music videos on 'Rage'
- 90% Australian music on ALL ABC radio, including Triple J and Classic FM, with either Australian performers or writers qualifying it as Australian. While we understand that Unearthed is all Australian, this digital only station marginalises Australian culture instead of making it the mainstream channel.

10% foreign content allows the ABC flexibility to due to following:

- acquire specialist programs from overseas that are needed e.g. 4 Corners runs 12 buy-ins each year, it is impractical to source these from Australia and meet their journalistic requirements
- run foreign content with Australian significance e.g. a program on Queen Elizabeth II would have relevance here as she is also Australian Queen.
- flexibility to run programs with a worldwide significance e.g. paying tribute to the passing of a significant musical artist.
- foreign music is readily available on free streaming platforms such as YouTube and Spotify. Any role the ABC previously had in promoting foreign music that was not readily accessible to Australia because of the import/local record label situation, has long since vanished. There is no justification to supporting foreign artists and sending taxpayer money to overseas millionaires and large record companies.

#### **FURTHER PROPOSALS FOR PROMOTING SCREEN CULTURE IN AUSTRALIA**

Distribution is the key factor in making Australian films 'normalised' for audiences, rather than an oddity or arthouse speciality.

Cinema distribution also provides access to both the PEP and Producer Offset funding rebates.

In order to ensure that films make it to Australian screens, I propose a rebate or subsidy to cinemas and theatres that screen an Australian film. This could be shaped in a way that doesn't affect any free trade deals with foreign partners, but underwrites or minimises the risk of loss to any theatre that screens an Australian film.

In the 21<sup>st</sup> Century, it is time we abandoned the cultural cringe and made Australian content the norm, rather than the exception. I don't believe this is possible without a significant change to our national broadcaster.