

National Cultural Policy Submission

Blue Rocket Productions

Submitted: On behalf of a for-profit arts business

About Blue Rocket Productions

Blue Rocket is an animation studio based in Tasmania celebrating over 24 years of creating innovative animated TV and interactive entertainment for kids. The studio created Australia's first kids' multiplatform project (*The Dog & Cat News*), Australia's first fully CGI television series (*Hoota & Snoz*) which was broadcast in over 120 countries, and has produced 24 television series. Blue Rocket has also collaborated with other independent producers to produce innovative online projects. The studio has won many awards for creative and technical excellence and is part of the award-winning team that produces *Little J and Big Cuz*. Produced by Ned Lander Media for NITV, ABC and ACTF, the series received the 2018 Logie for Most Outstanding Children's Television Series, along with Best Children's Program at the 2017 ATOM Awards, the inaugural SDIN Award, and a 2018 AWGIE award.

A creative sector brought to ruin by the Coalition Government for political gain

Like many children's production companies around Australia, Blue Rocket was severely impacted by the Coalition Government's politically motivated decision to cancel the Australian Children's content quotas at the start of the pandemic. Their decision put thousands of people out of work and brought many excellent children's production companies to the brink of ruin. Until a remedy is put in place, the industry will continue to free fall, and it is our hope that the National Cultural Policy not only reinvigorates this sector which is such a vital contributor to the Australian culture and our children's future, but also seizes upon an opportunity for significant growth.

<https://www.facebook.com/bluerocketproductions> | <https://bluerocket.au>

What challenges and opportunities do you see in the pillar or pillars most relevant to you? Feel free to respond to any or all pillars:

First Nations

Blue Rocket supports the nurturing of a thriving and self-determined First Nations creative ecosystem in which First Nations storytellers and creatives lead, tell and produce their own content. Supporting the development and training of emerging First Nations creatives and screen practitioners is essential to the success of this content.

Blue Rocket recommends incentive programs that provide support across all screen platforms and throughout the Arts to facilitate First Nations storytellers and their role in the arts, culture and national identity. It is imperative that an appropriate level of "scaffolding" is put in place to ensure that development of emerging first Nations talent has the best chance of success.

Blue Rocket urges investment into First Nations children's content to increase the diversity of children's content and allow both First Nations and non-Indigenous audiences to appreciate First Nations culture in the content offering.

A Place for Every Story

Comprising approximately 21% of our population, Australian children need and are entitled to see themselves and expressions of their own context and culture on all media and creative platforms. Their stories and creative expression contribute to their development, mental health, education, and understanding of social and cultural engagement.

Australia's diversity is not well represented on-screen, and regional Australia is particularly underrepresented. While work has been done to address other aspects of underrepresentation, the absence of regional perspectives and the lack of opportunities for regional Australians is appalling.

The previous government, for their own political gain, wilfully executed a campaign against the children's screen production sector, causing irreparable damage through the loss of creative and managerial talent, and the destruction of many companies that were the heart of this critical sector. The LNP's removal of the Australian children's content quotas from the free to air television networks, the defunding of the ABC, and their deliberate decision to avoid applying Australian content quotas to the streaming services (SVOD's), has ground Australian children's screen content almost to a halt. If there is to be a "Place for Every Story", an urgent remedy to the damage caused by the previous Federal Government needs to be applied.

The Centrality of the Artist

A suggested tweak: change "The Centrality of the Artist" to "The Centrality of the Creative". An example of this subtle change is the role of the Producer - someone who takes responsibility for and leads a creative project from concept to delivery and audience engagement. Often creators themselves, Producers are central to the delivery of content and ensure that the creative vision is realised.

Australian Children's screen content has traditionally been the hotbed for building a sustainable local film and television industry. Many Australian screen practitioners began their careers through training in children's television production and are now working in all genres and across film, broadcast and SVOD. The long term damage of the previous Federal Government's decision to remove the Australian Children's Content Quotas for commercial broadcasters and deliberately avoid applying Australian content quotas to the SVOD services will become increasingly apparent as this critical training ground is now almost non-existent.

It is worth noting that children's screen practitioners employ a diverse range of practitioners, including, but not limited to, writers, visual designers, artists, composers and arrangers, animators, costume and set designers, musicians, and sound designers.

Strong Institutions

Blue Rocket advocates strongly for an increase to funding for ABC, SBS and NITV as they are critical to sustaining the arts and culture of our nation. ABC is arguably Australia's single greatest cultural icon and has been subject to relentless attacks by powerful political and commercial enemies including deep funding cuts and divisive misinformation. It needs to be reinvigorated before it's too late and if we lose it, we won't get it back.

Blue Rocket strongly recommends a review of the Federally funded agency Screen Australia to ensure that it is realigned with the screen industry in both its vision and strategic planning.

Blue Rocket advocates strongly for continued financial support for the Australian Children's Television Foundation as an institution that is vital to the funding of Australian children's screen content.

Blue Rocket advocates strongly for renewed funding initiatives to support new and emerging screen practitioners. Many state level arts and screen organisations were "culled" under the previous Federal Government and the consequences of this will be felt throughout the screen and arts sectors in the near future unless this is urgently remedied and those organisations are reinvigorated.

Reaching the Audience

Australian children are a critical part of Australia's population, and one which deserves content created specifically for them, rather than relying upon adult content labelled as "family" viewing. There is no regulation for any broadcast channel or SVOD service to commission Australian children's screen content. The combined SVOD's annual Australian subscription revenue currently exceeds \$2.5 billion in Australia, yet they remain unregulated.

In addition to the application of SVOD content quotas, it is essential that content is promoted ("Discoverability"), particularly with respect to children's programming being readily accessible to them.

Blue Rocket advocates strongly for content regulation on SVOD platforms, so that the Australian programs have a pathway to market. In particular we recommend a minimum 20% overall Australian content quota with a 20% sub-quota for children's programming. Children make up approximately 21% of our demographic and are entitled to at least a 20% share of new Australian programming. It is also vitally important that the Australian content quotas on the SVOD services aligns closely with the English-speaking territories that are our co-production partners, who already have or are introducing streaming quotas at similar or higher levels.

The local content quota should be supported by key terms of trade that protect local ownership of Australian intellectual property, ensure that the commissioning funds are spent within the independent Australian industry and not diverted to the SVODs or their subsidiaries, and ensure discoverability of Australian programming to Australian viewers on the commissioning platforms.

Regulation of the SVOD platforms should allow the flexibility to accommodate new delivery models such as the FAST* channels that are currently emerging in the USA.

**FAST – Free Advertiser driven STreaming*

A 20% children's sub quota (based on an overall 20% SVOD quota) would not only deliver new programming but would create thousands of jobs throughout Australia and significantly boost export business for the industry.

Please tell us how each of the 5 pillars are important to you and your practice and why. Feel free to respond to any or all that are applicable to you:

First Nations

Blue Rocket has worked on the First Nations TV series "Little J & Big Cuz" for over 7 years and other First Nations projects. There is an underrepresentation of First Nations screen practitioners and a need for structural support to help emerging First Nations screen practitioners.

A Place for Every Story

The LNP's decision to cancel the Australian Children's Content Quotas has caused massive damage to what was a thriving industry. It was done for the benefit of the broadcasters themselves who had deliberately buried children's programs within their digital sub-channels.

The lack of regulation of the broadcasters or SVOD services has also put nearly all children's content behind paywalls with the exception of the vastly underfunded ABC and let the SVOD's off the hook from any Australian content obligation. This has decimated our business, along with a great many others throughout Australia, caused significant unemployment, and deprived Australian children of home-grown programming.

The Centrality of the Artist

The artist has long been relegated a hobby status in this country. That outlook is both ignorant and insulting and shows a complete lack of appreciation of how the arts and screen sectors positively influence almost every aspect of our lives. As a company that has employed thousands of creatives over the last 20+ years it is vital to us that emerging talent is both nurtured and appreciated.

Strong Institutions

The LNP's sustained attack on the arts and screen sectors over the last decade have caused serious damage to key institutions. ABC in particular, is arguable our single greatest cultural institution and has systematically been eroded. This organisation in particular needs to be urgently saved from ruin. If we lose it, we'll never get it back.

Reaching the Audience

The LNP's decision to remove Australian Children's content quotas for commercial broadcasters, avoid placing quotas on the SVOD services, and to decimate the ABC has all but ruined any chance for Australian children's producers to reach the audience. This needs to be turned around and quickly. The LNP was aware of a precedent for this and chose to ignore it. In 2003 the British government cancelled the UK children's quotas and over 97% of the industry went bankrupt. In 2017 the British Government realised their mistake and have been trying unsuccessfully to reinvigorate the sector. But all the management experience, creative talent and infrastructure has gone and their industry is simply not coming back. And that is exactly what is happening in Australia today.

Are there any other things that you would like to see in a National Cultural Policy?

Blue Rocket advocates strongly for:

- more support for regional producers and screen practitioners. This could take the form of a 10% boost to the Producer offset for regional producers working, producing and employing outside metropolitan areas.
- immediate action as we are already at risk of an entirely US and UK dominated content landscape for children. Content consumption is at its highest levels across all demographics yet commissioning of Australian Children's Programming is at its all-time lowest levels. This is at a time when children's use of streaming services has risen by 43% globally.
- a 10% Increase of the Producer Offset taking the percentage from 30% to 40% for vulnerable sub sectors of the industry such as Children's and First Nations screen content.