



MEDIA RELEASE

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One good year is no reason to avoid screen industry reforms: MEAA

A slump in domestic television drama production over the past year shows the need to maintain local content rules for both free-to-air and subscription TV, says the union for Australian screen workers.

A significant decline in both investment and hours of content produced for TV was a dark cloud in a mostly buoyant annual drama report released by Screen Australia this week.

While total production surged to a record \$1.9 billion last year, this was driven by one-off factors related to COVID-19 and is no cause to shirk from reforms to ensure the industry is sustainable in the future, says the Media, Entertainment & Arts Alliance.

An unprecedented 10 major offshore feature film productions were the key driver of the increased investment as producers flocked to Australia as a safe haven while COVID swept the northern hemisphere.

About \$1 billion of the total production spend came from 63 foreign backed productions for the big and small screen, but for television at home, the story was much different as last year's relaxation of local content rules having a big impact.

Spending on general television drama was 24% below the five year average and children's drama was 17% below average. General drama hours were 17% below average and children's drama hours were a whopping 56% below average.

Delving into the report also reveals that the lion's share of drama production was commissioned by public broadcasters, not commercial networks.

"Caution should be taken when reading the drama report as 2020-21 was a unique year when Australia was the fortunate beneficiary of decisions to relocate foreign film and TV production from the northern hemisphere," said MEAA Chief Executive Paul Murphy.

"A single boom year should not be an excuse to avoid dealing with underlying issues about the competitiveness of Australian screen incentives and the lack of a local content regime for streaming video on demand services.

"Meanwhile, the emerging slump in local television investment is a direct consequence of the relaxation of content quotas for free-to-air TV. It's hard not to conclude that local drama and children's TV are on a downward spiral because of this short-sighted Morrison Government decision.

"Fortunately, a concerted campaign prevented the government from also slashing the content requirements for subscription TV or the picture would be even bleaker.

"Last week's passage of legislation to increase the producer offset for television to 30% is welcome, but it is disappointing that another year has passed without any action by the Morrison Government on local content regulations for streaming video services like Netflix and Disney+."

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