



Producers' Perspectives on Australian Children's Television in the Streaming Era

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Producers' Perspectives on Australian Children's Television in the Streaming Era: Summary of Key Findings

This report presents findings from semi-structured interviews with 23 producers of Australian children's television, conducted between November 2021 and April 2024, which was a period of intense legislative, technological, and funding changes.



1.

Streaming Platforms: Opportunities and Challenges

- Producers identified streaming platforms as presenting new opportunities for children's content, particularly as children gravitate to streaming content
- Exclusive streaming content receives prominence on platforms
- Global streaming services were seen as reluctant to commission local Australian content
- Producers believe local content quotas for global streaming services are needed
- Few producers discussed the potential of video sharing platforms (e.g. YouTube) for distributing children's content



3.

Distinctiveness of Australian Children's TV Content

- Producers asserted that Australian children's television has distinct qualities that make it appealing to local and international audiences:
 - Sardonic humour
 - Local settings
 - First Nations representation
 - Respect for child audiences
 - Subversive and challenging themes



2.

Fostering Australian Cultural Identity and Belonging

- Producers argued that local content fosters a sense of belonging
- Children's television seen as promoting Australian cultural values
- Concerns were expressed that local identity will be diminished if there is an overreliance on international children's screen content



4.

Economic Value of Australian Children's TV

- Local children's television was identified as a sector that mentors new talent and builds capacity for wider screen industries
- Supporting local children's television was seen as key to keeping and increasing skilled jobs in Australia



5.

The ACTF: Expertise, Support, and the Need for Varied Funding

- Long-term expertise of ACTF valued
- ACTF's value crosses finance, development, production, and distribution
- Concerns expressed around the potential of the ACTF to operate as a gatekeeper



6.

The Impacts of Government Regulation and Funding

- Removal of children's content quotas perceived to have negatively impacted companies and individuals:
 - Reduction in skilled workers
 - Limitations on co-production opportunities
 - Subsidies in other countries create disadvantages in global market
- Call for implementation of local content quotas on global streaming services



7.

The Future of Australian Children's TV

- Producers identify an urgent need for multifaceted funding mechanism reform and greater protections for the local sector
- Wide uncertainty regarding the sustainability of the sector despite pride in quality and hope for the future



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Introduction

Australian Children’s Television Cultures (ACTC) is a research project based at Swinburne University of Technology in collaboration with RMIT University. In partnership with the Australian Children’s Television Foundation (ACTF), the four-year project investigates the status of the Australian children’s television industry, and the broader cultural role of children’s screen entertainment in people’s lives, memories, families, and education. The findings and outcomes of this project are designed to inform the Australian children’s television sector as it navigates an era of new viewing practices and policy changes.

This report presents findings from semi-structured interviews with 23 producers of Australian children’s television, conducted between November 2021 and April 2024, which was a period of intense legislative, technological, and funding changes. The research team sought to gather and analyse producers’ expert perspectives on the sector, with the goal of mapping trends, opportunities and challenges facing Australian children’s television producers. Nonetheless, it must be acknowledged, that Australian children’s television is a commercial industry, and as such the producers interviewed for this research have vested commercial interests. Thus, throughout this report these interviews are combined with wider industry reporting as well as findings from other research streams in the ACTC project to provide a rounded picture of contemporary Australian children’s television.

Background

The Australian children’s television industry sits at a critical juncture. Even as the sector continues to produce locally and internationally celebrated content, recent transformations prompted by media, market, and policy changes are posing significant challenges.

Australian children’s television is seen as serving the “best interests” of Australian children by providing them with programs that reflect their own cultural context.¹ In 2020, the Australian Federal Government announced the removal of quotas for children’s content on Australia’s commercial television networks.² These quotas required commercial networks to broadcast 130 hours of content for pre-school children, and 260 hours for children under 14 (including a minimum of 25 hours of new drama).³ Although the removal of these quotas was initially positioned as an emergency measure in response to the COVID-19 pandemic, it was subsequently maintained as a permanent policy. In an effort to counteract the loss in children’s television funding from commercial broadcasters, the 2020-21 Federal Budget pledged \$20 million to the national production and policy hub the Australian Children’s Television Foundation (ACTF) over two years for investment in new content, starting on July 1, 2021.⁴

Following the removal of quotas, by 2022, locally made children’s content on commercial free-to-air television had decreased by more than 84% compared with 2019.⁵ A 2024 expenditure report from the Australian Communications and Media Authority (ACMA) continued to map this decline in commercial television broadcasters’ investment in children’s programming, with the spending on children’s drama dropping from \$11.6 million in 2018-19, to \$2 million in 2020-21, to \$0 in 2022-23.⁶ Spending on children’s non-drama content likewise dropped from \$13.2 million in 2018-19 to \$743,820 in 2022-23.⁷ The broadcasting of children’s drama more than halved between 1999 and 2023, declining from 106 to 51 hours.⁸

In addition to these broadcasting trends, there has also been industry and public concern around the absence of requirements and regulation for streaming services to produce or distribute Australian children’s television.⁹ While producers in our study recognised the opportunities presented by streaming platforms, several participants cautioned against overestimating their capacity and/or desire to fill the void left by traditional broadcasters.

These industry trends have implications for both children’s cultural lives and the screen industry. Our 2022 nation-wide survey found that 83% of parents considered it “moderately”, “very”, or “extremely” important for children’s television to be Australian.¹⁰ Our child audience research also demonstrated that many children would like to watch more Australian content.¹¹

Despite the many challenges facing the sector, producers in our 2021-2024 interviews believed that Australian children’s television is very competitive on the international market relative to its size. Dan Walkington is the producer of the Emmy Award-winning nature documentary series *Built to Survive* that aims to introduce children to Australian animals. Walkington commented favourably on Australian children’s content on the world stage:

Australian content punches above its weight. At this year’s International Emmy Awards, three Australian productions were nominated, and all three won! Including our very own Built to Survive in the kids’ factual category. We’re a small country, but we’ve got a big footprint.

Dan Walkington, *Built to Survive*

Variations on this phrasing and sentiment about the Australian children’s television sector “punching above its weight” internationally was found across a number of this study’s interviews.

For decades Australian children’s TV content has been highly regarded internationally for its creativity, quality, and ability to attract audiences around the world. This is evidenced by numerous prestigious international awards and overseas sales over many years.

Andrea Denholm, *Spooky Files*

I still think we punch well above our weight internationally, and international broadcasters look at Australian content and always remark how well we do it.

Joanna Werner, *Crazy Fun Park*

¹ Potter, A. 2015, Creativity, Culture and Commerce: Creating Children’s Content with Public Value. Bristol: Intellect, p. ix. Potter, A. 2020, Producing Children’s Television in the On Demand Age, Bristol: Intellect, pp. 4-5.

² Knox, D. 2020, “Local quotas suspended, spectrum fees waived in media rescue,” TV Tonight, 15 April, <https://tvtonight.com.au/2020/04/local-quotas-suspended-spectrum-fees-waived-in-media-rescue.html> ; Balanzategui, J, McIntyre, J & Burke, L. 2020, “Cheese ‘n’ crackers! Concerns deepen for the future of Australian children’s television,” The Conversation, 1 October, <https://theconversation.com/cheese-n-crackers-concerns-deepen-for-the-future-of-australian-childrens-television-147183>.

³ Balanzategui, J, McIntyre, J and Burke, L. 2020, “Cheese ‘n’ crackers! Concerns deepen for the future of Australian children’s television,” The Conversation, 1 October.

⁴ Australian Government, Department of Infrastructure, Transport, Regional Development and Communications. 2020, “Q and As: modernising Australian screen content settings,” 30 September, <https://www.communications.gov.au/what-we-do/television/modernising-australian-screen-content-settings/qa>

⁵ Australian Communications and Media Authority. 2023, TV in Australia: How broadcasters meet the content standards, 2022 Report, <https://www.acma.gov.au/broadcaster-compliance-tv-content-standards>.

⁶ ACMA. 2024. “Commercial TV program expenditure: Report for the 2022-23 financial year,” Australian Communications and Media Authority, 16 May, <https://www.acma.gov.au/commercial-tv-program-expenditure>

⁷ In contrast with some international uses of the term “drama”, such as the Emmy Awards where drama and comedy are treated as distinct categories, in ACMA’s “definitions of terms” used in broadcasting standards an “Australian drama program” refers to a range of scripted content. This broad definition includes live-action and animated content, a variety of genres including comedy, and even scripted sketch comedy. Screen Australia also use this wide-ranging definition. ACMA’s use of “non-drama” refers to programs that do not have scripted elements like documentary. “Broadcasting Services (Australian Content and Children’s Television) Standards 2020” ACMA, 17 December 2020 <https://www.legislation.gov.au/F2020L01653/latest/text>

⁸ Lotz, A, McCutcheon, M, Potter, A, Sanson, K. 2024, “Australian Television Drama’s Uncertain Future: How Cultural Policy is Failing Australians,” QUT Digital Media Research Centre, Queensland University of Technology, <http://doi.org/10.5204/rep.eprints.248187>, p. 7.

⁹ Balanzategui, Burke, L and J, McIntyre, J. 2020, “What would Bandit do?”: reaffirming the educational role of Australian children’s television during the COVID-19 pandemic and beyond,” Media International Australia, vol. 178, no. 1, p. 2; Ward, M. 2022, “Netflix and Disney+ could wipe out local producers in two years,” Australian Financial Review, 29 March, <https://www.afr.com/companies/media-and-marketing/screen-companies-face-disaster-unless-regulators-act-on-streamers-20220329-p5a8v0>.

¹⁰ Burke, L, McIntyre, J, Balanzategui, J & Baker, D. 2024, “Parents’ Perspectives of Children’s TV in the Streaming Era - 2,” Swinburne University of Technology and RMIT University, <https://doi.org/10.26185/e2g2-kg75>

¹¹ Balanzategui, J, Baker, D, Clift, G, Burke, L, & McIntyre, J. 2024, “Australian Children’s Streaming Video Platform Habits, Fluencies, and Literacies”. Swinburne University of Technology and RMIT University. DOI 10.60836/p6re-bv50

1. Streaming Platforms: Opportunities and Challenges

The reflections from producers in this report articulate a complex narrative of pride, resilience, and concern. The funding and regulatory limitations currently faced by Australian producers are juxtaposed with their ability to produce high quality programs. Producers frequently called for close examination of policies and support structures to ensure the survival, growth, and vitality of the sector.

Methods and Study Design

The semi-structured interviews conducted for this study sought to uncover both producers’ individually held views, as well as trends in shared aspirations, attitudes, or concerns within their specialised field. The 23 interviewees were recruited using the researchers’ networks, including those of the funding partner the Australian Children’s Television Foundation (see Appendix A for list of participants). The interviewees included both relatively new and highly experienced producers. Although many of these producers have created feature-length and short-form content for child audiences, the interviews primarily focused on their production of television programs for public service broadcasters, commercial free-to-air broadcasters, cable channels, and, increasingly, SVODs (subscription video on demand).

Of the 23 participants, 14 primarily work in live action while nine more often produce animation, but there is much overlap between these two areas. With one exception, all producers have made new content for broadcast or streaming since 2020. Some interviewed producers (co)own and operate their production companies while others are executives in companies with international partnerships. The interviewees are a representative sample of the Australian children’s television sector, as producers from 15 of the 23 Australian children’s television and VOD dramas identified in the Screen Australia Drama reports 2021/2022 and 2022/2023 participated in this research.

Qualitative research methods, such as semi-structured interviews, are considered the best approach to investigating people who have “highly specialised” roles with expert knowledge in their field.¹² Interviews capture insider industry experiences but also the producer’s values and vested interests. As children’s media scholar Anna Potter notes, producers function as:

“the steward of the programme’s creative vision, who must also take responsibility for raising finance, and assuming all legal risks during production. The producer must also project manage the production process from start to finish, including hiring key creative practitioners, and ensuring programmes are delivered on time and on budget.”¹³

This study’s interviews not only examined the practicalities of producers’ work in getting an Australian children’s television program ready for delivery, but also their reflections upon the screen industries, their career journeys, and their young audience.

Interviews took place via video conferencing or in-person and typically lasted around 45 minutes to one hour. The flexible format allowed the research team to ask for clarifications and explore details around the production of specific programs.¹⁴ NVivo software was used to help facilitate coding and data management of the interview transcripts, combined with manual thematic analysis.¹⁵ As sociologist Elaine Welsh argues, there is value in combining manual and computer assisted analysis to identify both patterns and nuance within the patterns.¹⁶ Participants were provided with transcripts of their interviews, with the opportunity to edit any materials deemed commercially or otherwise sensitive. Some participants opted to remain anonymous.

Collectively these interviewees provided a detailed picture of the challenges and opportunities facing the children’s television sector, and the research team would like to express their gratitude to the participants for their contributions.

Producers identified streaming platforms, especially subscription video on demand (SVODs), as presenting new opportunities for both making and distributing children’s content, particularly as children increasingly gravitate to streaming. In our 2021 research parents identified the top 10 “channels” used by their children as streaming services including broadcast video on demand services (e.g. ABC iView, ABC Kids), subscriptions video on demand services (e.g. Netflix, Disney+), and online video sharing platforms (e.g. YouTube).¹⁷ Similarly, our child audience research found that children aged 7–9 years old are very technically fluent with streaming platforms, with Netflix and YouTube being the most popular platforms.¹⁸ These trends are reflected in findings from the 2023 Television and Media Survey (commissioned by the Australian Government’s Department of Infrastructure, Transport, Regional Development, Communications and the Arts) which showed around three quarters of children aged 8–15 had watched content on free video streaming services (e.g. YouTube, Twitch, Tubi) in the past week, and almost two thirds had watched online subscription services (e.g. Netflix, Prime Video, Binge).¹⁹ These Australian viewing practices align with international trends.²⁰

Producers were keenly aware of this shift and argued that Australian children need to be able to find local content on streaming services, for both the sector’s ongoing financial viability and the social value of children seeing Australian content (discussed further below). As one executive producer who had a program streaming on Paramount+ observed:

Mainly [teenagers are] on Netflix, or Stan, or Binge, or Paramount+, and that’s where they consume their content when they want to on the device that they want to. So, we really need to get Australian content into those streaming platforms, and we need to do it in a big volume. And then they will watch it. If it’s there, they will watch it.

Kate Gorman, More Than This

Producers emphasised the advantages of having full financial backing from a streaming service, while also having greater potential to reach global audiences. Wayne Hope, a writer-producer whose programs *Little Lunch* (2015-16) and *InBESTigators* (2019) have been distributed internationally on Netflix, identified the benefits of working with the global streaming service:

It solves some problems in that you don’t need to try and piece together a finance plan because they’re kind of a one-stop shop. If they say we’re buying it for... 190 countries... it’s kind of over and they come in with the financial clout to fill out a finance plan and then you’re making your show... The benefits are the incredible thing of when it’s released, it’s released instantaneously in all of those markets.

Wayne Hope, Little Lunch

In the first half of 2024, *The InBESTigators* was the most popular Australian children’s program on Netflix, with 9.6 million views globally across both seasons.²¹ Nine Australian children’s programs had one million+ views on the platform in this six-month period.

Nonetheless, a 2019 study showed only 1.7% of titles on Netflix were Australian.²² Despite the reach of streaming services and the depth of their catalogues, in our child audience research we observed how 7–9-year-old children struggled to find and identify Australian children’s content on streaming services despite being fluent using the streaming platforms.²³ Producers noted when it comes to interface prominence and marketing, streaming services have tended to favour exclusive content over non-exclusive licensed programming. For example, Netflix seems to push its original content to the top of home screens and give them larger thumbnail images.²⁴ In our interviews, one writer-creator and executive producer observed:

There’s a benefit in a Netflix exclusive. A Netflix exclusive means Netflix get behind it and they promote it. When you’re a [non-exclusive] show on Netflix like we are, that means that the promotion has to come from us, and that’s difficult.

Tom Taylor, The Deep

¹² Ritchie, J and Ormston, R. 2014, “The application of qualitative methods to social research,” in J. Ritchie et al (eds) *Qualitative Research Practice*, Los Angeles: Sage, pp. 37-38.

¹³ Potter, A. 2020, *Producing Children’s Television in the On Demand Age*, Bristol: Intellect, p. 2.

¹⁴ Ritchie and Ormston, 2014, p. 38. Galletta, A. 2013, *Mastering the Semi-Structured Interview and Beyond: From Research Design to Analysis and Publication*, New York: New York University Press, pp. 24, 79.

¹⁵ See Puppis, M and Vanden Bulck, H. 2019, “Doing media policy research,” in H. Van den Bulck et al (eds), *The Palgrave Handbook of Methods for Media Policy Research*, Cham: Palgrave Macmillan, pp. 36-37.

¹⁶ Welsh, E. 2002, “Dealing with data: Using NVivo in the qualitative data analysis process,” *Forum : Qualitative Social Research*, volume 3, issue 2, <https://www.proquest.com/scholarly-journals/dealing-with-data-using-nvivo-qualitative/docview/867759998/se-2>.

¹⁷ Burke, L, McIntyre, J, Balanzategui, J, & Baker, D. 2022, “Parents’ Perspectives on Australian Children’s Television in the Streaming Era,” Swinburne University of Technology. <https://doi.org/10.26185/xx0-d294>

¹⁸ Balanzategui, J, Baker, D, Clift, G, Burke, L, & McIntyre, J. 2024, “Australian Children’s Streaming Video Platform Habits, Fluencies, and Literacies”. Swinburne University of Technology and RMIT University. DOI 10.60836/p6re-bv50

¹⁹ Social Research Centre, 2024, “The 2023 Television & Media Survey - Summary Report,” prepared for the Department of Infrastructure, Transport, Regional Development, Communications and the Arts, Social Research Centre, Melbourne, 15 April, <https://www.infrastructure.gov.au/department/media/publications/television-and-media-survey-2023-summary-report>, pp. 33-38.

²⁰ Ofcom. 2024, “Children and parents: media use and attitudes report 2023,” 15 January, <https://www.ofcom.org.uk/media-use-and-attitudes/media-habits-children/children-and-parents-media-use-and-attitudes-report-2023/> p. 1.

Australian producers, like many of their international equivalents, have been calling for the government to provide protection for domestic screen industries through a quota system for global streaming services that would require services like Netflix, Prime Video, and Disney+ to invest in the local industry.²⁵ Many participants in this research echoed these wider calls for quotas on streaming platforms. Advocates argued that mandated quotas on streaming platforms would help ameliorate the loss of commercial broadcasting children’s content quotas. Producers believed that the introduction of local content quotas on global streaming services is “vital”, “critical”, and “essential.” As one executive who produced child and adult programs for both Australian broadcasters and global streaming services noted:

I think it's tough for children's producers. I mean the only consistent place is the ABC... They don't want to be the only player... The trouble is, once regulation's gone, it's harder to get it back... The opportunity is in SVOD regulation.

Stuart Menzies, Crazy Fun Park

In 2023 the Australian Federal Government’s National Cultural Policy – Revive noted that “it is important that streaming services invest in key genres, including children’s content.”²⁶ The Australian Minister for the Arts Tony Burke announced that legislation for local quotas on streaming platforms would be introduced into Parliament in the second half of 2023, to take effect no later than 1 July 2024.²⁷ This did not occur,²⁸ and by November 2024, the plan was “quietly shelved.”²⁹

Video Sharing Platforms

Producers in this study frequently voiced their concerns about the impact of global streaming services like Netflix and Disney+ on traditional viewing habits and the local children’s television sector, but few discussed video sharing platforms such as YouTube and TikTok.

Social media and video sharing platforms are regularly dominated by children’s content with about half of YouTube’s top 50 subscribed channels featuring children’s content.³⁰ Nonetheless, the producers in this study tended not to identify these platforms as potential outlets for the children’s content they produce. This tendency may reflect the difficulties of developing a robust business model for kids’ content on YouTube, particularly quality content. The platform does not permit personalised advertising for children’s content and requires the comments function to be disabled.³¹ These changes were made in response to a 2019 US lawsuit around the collection of children’s personal information. For creators of children’s content on YouTube, huge revenue losses were reported of 60 to 75 percent by 2020.³²

Recent research published by a parental control software company Qustodio has found that nearly half of Australian children aged 10–15 spend on average over two hours each day on TikTok, while YouTube (58%) is one of the two most popular apps with 13–15-year-olds.³³ In the audience research we conducted with children and parents for the larger ACTC project, we also noted how children gravitated toward these social media platforms as they got older.³⁴

Broadcast programs and other legacy children’s media is frequently posted on YouTube by rights holders and general platform users, but this relies on initial production funding from other outlets.

At the same time, video sharing can help build an audience and brand recognition for legacy media. Internationally, *Mr Bean: The Animated Series* (2002-2019) found social media success with “19 billion views across official YouTube channels and 15 million likes on TikTok”.³⁵ In 2024 global distributor Banijay Rights sought to further monetise this popularity by creating a free ad-supported streaming TV (FAST) channel dedicated to *Mr Bean: The Animated Series*. In addition, the program itself was revived with a new 2025 season commissioned in partnership with Warner Bros. Discovery and ITVX.³⁶ The popularity of this legacy content on video sharing platforms demonstrates the potential for flow-on opportunities for traditional children’s content producers.

The tendency for children to favour social media and video sharing platforms as they get older may partially explain why Australia’s linear channel ABC ME, which was established in 2016 to target school age children, was replaced by the ABC in 2024 with an all-ages channel ABC Entertains and four digital streams with a focus on kids and families.³⁷ The creator of supernatural teen show *Crazy Fun Park* Nicholas Verso noted the viewing habits of these older children in our 2022 interview:

They're not just watching ABC ME. They've also got YouTube and TikTok... They'll download it and they'll be seeing it so, yeah, there's more competition for their attention than ever before.

Nicholas Verso, Crazy Fun Park

Some producers did highlight the role of these platforms in promoting their shows, such as the Olivia Deeble, the producer, creator, and star of the teen series *More Than This*, which was distributed on Paramount+:

I think Euphoria really changed the game, and I think it really fitted an aesthetic, and kids these days just want aesthetics. Like, I hired a film photographer; they love film photos, you want it because of TikTok; everything's a trend, everything needs to be cool.

Olivia Deeble, More Than This

Recognising the popularity of these platforms with young users, Screen Australia is providing increasing support for creators producing content for online platforms. This includes the “Skip Ahead” initiative to support Australian YouTube creators, which specified at least one project aimed at children for the first time in 2024.³⁸ In addition, Screen Australia collaborated with the ACTF on the Kids IP Incubator in 2024, an initiative designed to support “children’s content makers to develop Australian IP for digital platforms”.³⁹ Most of the interviews for this research took place before the announcement of these supports, which may partly explain why respondents did not regularly discuss video sharing platforms in interviews.

The Australian government’s proposed social media ban for those under 16 years of age was introduced into parliament in November 2024, with TikTok included in its list of “age-restricted social media platforms.”⁴⁰ Prior to this development, the ABC had started branching out into TikTok content for young users, with its first TikTok series *The Disposables* (2023),⁴¹ while the LGBTQIA+ teen comedy *The Formal* (2021-2022), which received Screen Australia funding, attracted “more than 3.4 million cumulative views” for seasons 2 and 3.⁴² Qualitative research shows that children prefer screen content that features characters either their own age or “a few years older,”⁴³ meaning that these teen shows based around 16 and 17-year-old protagonists respectively would normally be expected to also attract younger teen viewers, a possibility that would be restricted under the proposed legislation.

As such, legislative structures, both existing and proposed, create challenges for making commercially viable children’s content on the video sharing platforms that children frequently use, even while the key funding bodies are providing greater support for these platforms.

²⁵ Netflix, 2024, “What We Watched: A Netflix Engagement Report: Views from January to June 2024,” 19 September, <https://about.netflix.com/en/news/what-we-watched-the-first-half-of-2024>

²⁶ Lobato, R. and Scarlata, A. 2019, Australian content in SVOD catalogs: availability and discoverability – 2019 edition. Report, RMIT University, Australia, <https://apo.org.au/node/264821>

²⁷ Balanzategui, J., Baker, D., Clift, G., Burke, L., & McIntyre, J. 2024, “Australian Children’s Streaming Video Platform Habits, Fluencies, and Literacies”. Swinburne University of Technology and RMIT University. DOI 10.60836/p6re-bv50

²⁸ Van Esler, M. 2021, “In Plain Sight: Online TV Interfaces as Branding,” *Television & New Media*, vol. 22, no. 7, p. 737. 742

²⁹ Burke, K. 2024, “Australia joins international call for local content quotas on streaming TV platforms,” *The Guardian*, 18 January, <https://www.theguardian.com/culture/2024/jan/18/australia-joins-international-call-for-local-content-quotas-on-streaming-tv-platforms>

³⁰ Australian Government. 2023, National Cultural Policy—Revive: a place for every story, a story for every place, 9 February, <https://www.arts.gov.au/publications/national-cultural-policy-revive-place-every-story-story-every-place>

²⁷ Knox, D. 2023, “Australian content quotas on Streaming platforms in 2024,” *TV Tonight*, 30 January, <https://tvtonight.com.au/2023/01/australian-content-quotas-on-streaming-platforms-in-2024.html>

²⁸ Siemienowicz, R. 2024, “Australian government misses deadline for local content streaming quotas,” *Screen Hub*, 4 July, <https://www.screenhub.com.au/news/news/australian-producers-bemoan-missed-deadline-for-local-content-streaming-quotas-2646260/>

²⁹ Scarlata, A 2024, “Australia has backed away from plans to introduce local quotas on streaming platforms – again,” *The Conversation*, 14 November, <https://theconversation.com/australia-has-backed-away-from-plans-to-introduce-local-quotas-on-streaming-platforms-again-243248>

³⁰ Screen Australia. 2024. “Kids IP Incubator Webinar September 2024” <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xSWg9K-29d8>

³¹ Moreno, J. 2020, “YouTube Disables Personalized Ads, Comments On Children’s Videos,” *Forbes*, 6 January, <https://www.forbes.com/sites/johanmoreno/2020/01/06/youtube-disables-personalized-ads-comments-on-childrens-videos/>

³² Feller, G. and Burroughs, B. 2022, “Branding Kidfluencers: Regulating Content and Advertising on YouTube,” *Television & New Media*, vol. 23, no. 6, 575-592.

³³ Qustodio. 18 August, 2024. “Apps Through the Ages” <https://www.qustodio.com/en/research/apps-through-the-ages-australia/>

³⁴ Burke, L., McIntyre, J., Balanzategui, J., & Baker, D. 2022, “Parents’ Perspectives on Australian Children’s Television in the Streaming Era,” Swinburne University of Technology. <https://doi.org/10.26185/xtt0-d294>; Balanzategui, J., Baker, J., Clift, G., Burke, L., & McIntyre, J. 2024, “Australian Children’s Streaming Video Platform Habits, Fluencies, and Literacies”. Swinburne University of Technology and RMIT University. DOI 10.60836/p6re-bv50

³⁵ Goldbart, M. 2024 “Mr Bean’ Fast Channel Launches,” *Deadline*, 21 June, <https://deadline.com/2024/06/mr-bean-fast-channel-banijay-rights-1235979894/>

³⁶ Licensing Magazine, 2024, “Mr. Bean: The Animated Series is returning for a fourth season,” 5 January, <https://www.licensingmagazine.com/2024/01/05/mr-bean-the-animated-series-is-returning-for-a-fourth-season/>

³⁷ Knox, D. 2024, “ABC multichannels replaced with ABC Family, ABC Entertains.” *TV Tonight*, 9 May <https://tvtonight.com.au/2024/05/abc-multichannels-replaced-with-abc-family-abc-entertains.html>

³⁸ Screen Australia, 2024, “Screen Australia and YouTube Australia launch Skip Ahead 9,” 12 February, <https://www.screenaustralia.gov.au/sa/media-centre/news/2024/02-12-skip-ahead-9-open>

³⁹ Screen Australia, 2024, “Screen Australia and the Australian Children’s Television Foundation announce Kids IP Incubator initiative”, 27 August, <https://www.screenaustralia.gov.au/sa/media-centre/news/2024/08-27-kids-ip-incubator-initiative>

⁴⁰ Albanese, A. and Rowland, M. 2024, “Albanese Government delivers world-leading legislation to protect children online,” 21 November, <https://www.pm.gov.au/media/albanese-government-delivers-world-leading-legislation-protect-children-online>

⁴¹ Vann-Wall, S. 2023, “The Disposables, ABC’s first TikTok series – creator & cast interview,” *Screen Hub*, 20 September, <https://www.screenhub.com.au/news/features/the-disposables-abc-interview-2624650/>

⁴² Screen Australia, 2022, Annual Report 2021/22, October, <https://www.screenaustralia.gov.au/getmedia/4af98de9-e06a-4269-ae3-98d7fd5c52ee/SA-Annual-Report-2021-2022.pdf>. Ben Pobjie, 2023, “The Formal: ‘The next day we logged on and it had a million views’,” *Sydney Morning Herald*, 18 January, <https://www.smh.com.au/culture/tv-and-radio/the-formal-the-next-day-we-logged-on-and-it-had-a-million-views-20221222-p5c87a.html>

⁴³ Sheldon, L. 1998, “The middle years: Children and television – cool or just plain boring?” *Wired up: Young people and the electronic media*, ed. S. Howard. London: UCL Press, 75-92.

2. Fostering Australian Cultural Identity and Belonging

Producers consistently commented on the importance of Australian children seeing Australian culture and values represented in screen media. They emphasised what they saw as the pivotal role of Australian children’s television in shaping cultural identity, fostering pride, and challenging biases. Participants also stressed the importance of Australian voices, characters, and stories to counterbalance the dominance of US, and to a lesser degree UK, culture in the media landscape. This sentiment was echoed across the ACTC research with educators, parents, children, and cross-generational audiences all highlighting the role of local children’s television in social cohesion.⁴⁴

Australian Culture and Identity

Producers advocated for the preservation and promotion of Australian content, warning against the potential loss of cultural identity and values if the current reliance on overseas media increases. Several producers in our interviews claimed that by showing “Australian stories back to Australian kids”, local content provides “a sense of our place in the world” and helps audiences realise that place “is really important”. Kieran Hoyle is a producer on the Canberra set political comedy-drama *The PM’s Daughter* (2022-). He argues that:

I think it’s important to preserve the Australian voice across a whole range of different genres and formats... But certainly, for kids, because they are so impressionable and at that young age, I think it is valuable to be able to see Australian stories being told on screen, made for kids, starring Australian kids.

Kieran Hoyle, *The PM’s Daughter*

Diversity of Australian Identity

Producers believed that children’s television needs to reflect a wide range of Australian identities and experiences. Local television was identified as a potent means of representing diverse experiences, promoting cultural awareness, and fostering inclusivity. This, in turn, was seen as vital for nurturing a sense of belonging and understanding among a wide range of Australian children.

Ned Lander, who produces the animated show *Little J & Big Cuz* (2017-) about a couple of Indigenous Australian kids living with their Nanna, described the show’s production process and aims:

The scripts for each series are conceived and written by First Nations writers from across Australia, telling stories of different experiences. The stories are set in saltwater, freshwater and desert country... The language versions of the show have proven to be a timely and significant contribution to what is available for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children on television. The shows also broaden non-Indigenous children’s understanding of First Nations languages, cultures and histories.

Ned Lander, *Little J & Big Cuz*

The drama series *First Day* (2020-2022) follows a transgender girl Hannah, played by trans actor and activist Evie Macdonald, as she navigates the challenges of starting high school. The program has been distributed internationally and won numerous awards including a GLAAD Media Award. Producer Kirsty Stark described the consultation undertaken in the production of the program, which was broadcast on ABC Me.

[We’ve] tried to authentically draw from what would realistically be happening with students at the time. We do a lot of consultation with the trans community and with parents of trans teens, and now that it’s getting older with trans teens themselves and Evie’s played a big part in that, given that she’s been with us through the whole process.

Kirsty Stark, *First Day*

Producers were outspoken about their desire to represent the diversity of Australian identity “that you naturally see within younger generations” and providing “a mirror in which children can see themselves”.

Cultural Education

Producers frequently highlighted the educational value of children’s television; particularly how local programs can provide learning in a way that is relevant to an Australian context, but that does not seem forced or overtly didactic. Patrick Egerton is the producer of the animated series *Kangaroo Beach* (2021-), which features anthropomorphised Australian animals as lifeguard cadets. Surf Life Saving Australia, which is Australia’s peak coastal water safety authority, is an official advisor to the series. Egerton discussed balancing humour with practical skills when producing the series:

The challenge that we set ourselves was creating a show that’s fun and endearing and has heart and is adventurous, but still has a water safety learn in every episode without becoming didactic.

Patrick Egerton, *Kangaroo Beach*

Even in programs that are aimed at older child audiences, producers identified opportunities to instil values and address social issues. The horror-comedy series *Crazy Fun Park* (2023) engages with serious subjects like death, but as producer Stuart Menzies noted when interviewed for this research:

Kids’ TV at its best helps to inform and educate in an age-appropriate way, and Crazy Fun Park... deals with all sorts of tough issues, and it tries to put them into a context that makes them fun... and age appropriate.

Stuart Menzies, *Crazy Fun Park*

Our study’s participants also described how the local content they produced was uniquely placed to instil cultural values and promote critical thinking, with producers of *Little J & Big Cuz* noting:

Preparing kids for what to expect at school clearly helps them to cope with this big change in their lives. Starting school is challenging and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children living in rural and remote communities often face even bigger challenges. The show aims to give First Nations kids a sense of what school will be like.

Ned Lander, *Little J & Big Cuz*

It’s normalising Aboriginal culture and Aboriginal life for a lot of white kids who may be otherwise prejudiced... it’s such a soft educational thing that is changing our culture in the most subtle way. We’re not going to really observe the results of that for 20 years, but it’s totally worth it.

David Gurney, *Little J & Big Cuz*

Producers believed that local children’s content can provide everyday Australian education that does not talk down to its audience. This sentiment was echoed in our 2021 Parent Survey in which parents celebrated Australian children’s content for providing everyday learning including water and sun safety, Australian history and culture, and preparation for school.⁴⁵

⁴⁴Burke, L., McIntyre, J., Balanzategui, J., & Baker, D. 2022, “Parents’ Perspectives on Australian Children’s Television in the Streaming Era,” Swinburne University of Technology. <https://doi.org/10.26185/xt0-d294>; McIntyre, J., Burke, L., Baker, D., & Balanzategui, J. 2023, “Kids’ TV Memories: Audience Perspectives on the Roles and Long-term Value of Australian Children’s Television,” Swinburne University of Technology. <https://doi.org/10.26185/cchb-wf43>; Balanzategui, J., Baker, D., Clift, G., Burke, L., & McIntyre, J. 2024, “Australian Children’s Streaming Video Platform Habits, Fluencies, and Literacies”. Swinburne University of Technology and RMIT University. DOI 10.60836/p6re-bv50

⁴⁵Burke, L., McIntyre, J., Balanzategui, J. & Baker, D. 2022, “Parents’ Perspectives of Children’s TV in the Streaming Era,” Industry Report. Swinburne Research Bank | Swinburne University of Technology.

3. Distinctiveness of Australian Children's TV Content

Many of the producers interviewed asserted that Australian children's television has distinct qualities that make programs appealing and relevant to local audiences. At the same time, this cultural specificity was seen as helping Australian programs stand out in a crowded global market. Indeed, the international success of the unambiguously Australian animated series *Bluey* was identified by many as demonstrating the global potential of culturally specific programs.⁴⁶ Vanna Morosini, who produced the immersive history series *Are You Tougher Than Your Ancestors?* (2020) argued:

I think it's also a big mistake in a way, to think that the more local a show is, the more Australian it is, the less likely it is to travel. Because I think in some ways it's the opposite. The more heartfelt our content is, the more other cultures can connect with it. And that's where Bluey is. It has proven that now.

Vanna Morosini, *Are You Tougher Than Your Ancestors?*

In addition to fostering belonging and national identity (see Section 2 above), the cultural specificity of many Australian programs was identified by producers as providing differentiation in the global children's entertainment market. This distinctiveness, producers argued, helps to export Australian culture overseas where it often finds a receptive audience.

While several producers discussed the difficulty in striking a balance between local and international appeal, many emphasised the benefits of leaning into what were identified as Australian qualities, including a) sardonic humour, b) Australian landscapes and settings, c) First Nations representation, d) respect for child audiences, and e) subversive and challenging themes.

a) Sardonic humour

One of the most common traits producers highlighted as characteristic of Australian children's television content was its unique sense of humour. Producers suggested that this humour combined a lightness with "irreverence" to give Australian content a distinctive feel and style. David Gurney, who is the CEO of Tasmania-based Blue Rocket Productions, articulated what many identified as the Australian sense of humour that sets local children's content apart from overseas programs:

I think Australians generally have a slightly sardonic sense of humour, they have a laconic style, and I think that's what makes us different... In writing for children's programming, there's a lot of work done to kind of shape every single word... If they get the slightest whiff that they're being educated, they're gone, they're just reaching for the remote.

David Gurney, *Little J & Big Cuz*

Corroborating the perceptions of producers, in our parents study participants identified irreverent humour, sometimes described as a "Larrikin" sensibility, as the number one quality of "good Australian children's TV".⁴⁷ The producer participants in this research also identified this disregard for convention across Australian children's television, with the creator of action-adventure animated series *The Deep* Tom Taylor noting of the show's "off-beat" humour:

I think there's a very Australian feel to the show. There is a very Australian sense of humour in particular... there's no tall poppies. We tend to give crap to everything.

Tom Taylor, *The Deep*

Picking up on the centrality of sardonic humour to Australian children's television programs, cross-generational audiences in our 2023 Kids' TV Memories report highlighted "cheeky humour" as one of the top three reasons respondents remembered and loved certain Australian children's programs.⁴⁸

b) Australian landscapes and settings

From the bush-set adventures of *Skippy the Bush Kangaroo* (1968-1970) to the coastal hauntings of *Round the Twist* (1990-2001) local children's television has been marked by its use of Australia's distinct and varied landscape. Producers in this research highlighted this tradition and emphasised the importance of using Australian settings to provide a sense of place that is relatable for local viewers and visually appealing to global audiences. Our research with Australian children aged 7-9 years old demonstrates they primarily use landscapes and animals to identify local content as Australian.⁴⁹ Rachel Clements is the founder of the Alice Springs-based production company Brindle Films. She described how the comparatively remote Northern Territory town provided her company's productions, including the motocross drama *Maverix* (2022), with a distinctive identity:

The Australianness I guess comes from the landscape as much as anything. We developed the Alice [Springs] shows to be Alice kids with the language that they would use here.

Rachel Clements, *Maverix*

Similarly, producer Dan Walkington noted how the nature documentary series *Built to Survive* (2022) made use of Queensland's diverse landscape:

Visually, we are so privileged to have such varied landscapes. One of the reasons we filmed this series in Queensland is that we have everything from coral reefs to deserts, to tropical rainforests and grasslands, all in one state.

Dan Walkington, *Built to Survive*



⁴⁶ Potter, A. 2021, "Globalising the local in children's television for the post-network era: How Disney+ and BBC Studios helped Bluey the Australian cattle dog jump the national fence," *International Journal of Cultural Studies*, vol. 24, no. 2, pp. 216-232.

⁴⁷ Burke, L., McIntyre, J., Balanzategui, J., & Baker, D. 2022, "Parents' Perspectives on Australian Children's Television in the Streaming Era," Swinburne University of Technology. <https://doi.org/10.26185/xt0-d294>; Burke, L., McIntyre, J., Balanzategui, J. & Baker, D. 2024, "Parents' Perspectives of Children's TV in the Streaming Era - 2," Swinburne University of Technology and RMIT University. <https://doi.org/10.26185/e2g2-kg75>

⁴⁸ McIntyre, J., Burke, L., Baker, D., & Balanzategui, J. 2023, "Kids' TV Memories: Audience Perspectives on the Roles and Long-term Value of Australian Children's Television," Swinburne University of Technology. <https://doi.org/10.26185/cchb-wf43>

⁴⁹ Balanzategui, J., Baker, D., Clift, G., Burke, L., & McIntyre, J. 2024, "Australian Children's Streaming Video Platform Habits, Fluencies, and Literacies". Swinburne University of Technology and RMIT University. DOI 10.60836/p6re-bv50

c) First Nations representation

Several producers highlighted how the shared knowledge, perspectives, and representation of First Nations people increasingly contribute to the distinct character of Australian children’s television. They also noted that regardless of whether these programs are picked up by international markets, there is a cultural value and responsibility to tell Indigenous stories that could not be made elsewhere. *Little J & Big Cuz* producer Ned Lander explained why he believed the Logie Award-winning animated series provided much-needed First Nations representation.

In developing the show, the question of sense of identity was front and centre. Quite simply, in talking to a lot of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander colleagues, that sense of not having any images of yourself being reflected back to you as a child, as a small child, was a very big issue.

Ned Lander, *Little J & Big Cuz*

Producer Dan Walkington pointed out the unique perspective third generation Indigenous educator Phil Breslin brings to the nature documentary series *Built to Survive* as creator and host:

*The show’s host Phil is Indigenous himself and was really keen to include his own experience and knowledge that had been shared with him. The idea of letting kids in remote communities see their own Country represented on the screen was also a strong driver. And personally, as a white guy living and working in Australia, I think I have an obligation to engage with First Nations people in this country, to listen to what stories they want to share. The show was called *Built to Survive* and who better to help share that story than the oldest living culture on the planet.*

Dan Walkington, *Built to Survive*

d) Respect for child audiences

Representing the world from a child’s perspective—without being patronising—emerged as a key theme in several interviews. Producers cautioned that “you absolutely can’t talk down to” child audiences because they are “smart inquiring minds”, who are more “advanced” in their thinking compared to previous generations due, in part, to their unprecedented access to a wide range of information. Producers strongly emphasised how Australian children’s television is characterised by its respect for child audiences, while avoiding the condescending deliveries seen as typical of some overseas content. As Joanna Werner, whose work includes the Emmy Award-nominated *Dance Academy* (2010-2013), Netflix series *Surviving Summer* (2022-), and Logie Award-winning *Crazy Fun Park* explained:

I’ve been very inspired by other kids’ TV producers and their shows and used that to really push me to try to make our production values as high as they can be, to make the scripts as sophisticated and complex as they can be, and to never, ever talk down to your audience. I think that’s something that Australian television does really well. It’s quite grounded and real and doesn’t ever take for granted its audience.

Joanna Werner, *Crazy Fun Park*

Maverix producer Rachel Clements cautioned that the confidence Australian children’s television demonstrates in its child audience should not be taken for granted, arguing that reflecting a child’s perspective with respect should be guided by research into contemporary children’s lived experiences rather than adult assumptions or sensibilities:

When we limit what we’re allowed to say in kids’ content in this country because we’re so risk averse to parents complaining, we’re absolutely minimising the realistic nature of what it is to be a kid in Australia at this point.

Rachel Clements, *Maverix*

Increasingly children’s content is adopting an “undifferentiated address” where the child and adult audience are treated as a single entity.⁵⁰ In our 2021 research 9 out of 10 parents described co-viewing content with their children.⁵¹ Producers in this study argued that by not talking down to child viewers Australian children’s programs were often well suited to family co-viewing, with Andrea Denholm, producer of horror-comedy *Spooky Files* (2023), explaining:

*We love the idea of kids watching the series with their adults and older siblings. The creators of *Spooky Files*, Guy Edmonds and Matt Zeremes, also created *Hardball*, which attracted a high co-viewing audience. While the primary demographic for *Spooky Files* is kids 7–11, the comedy, nostalgia, gentle scares, and themes are also very appealing to older kids and adults.*

Andrea Denholm, *Spooky Files*

e) Subversive and challenging themes.

Producers asserted that Australian children’s television tends to incorporate themes that critique power structures, such as corporations and societal norms. These subversive tendencies can be traced back to early Australian successes in children’s television like *Round the Twist*, which was more challenging than its overseas equivalents like *Goosebumps* (1995-1998).⁵² This approach was seen by producers as a unique strength, with Australian kids’ television being unafraid to question authority and the status quo. Kieran Hoyle described child audiences as “very advanced in their political thinking at a much earlier age than previous generations”, which enabled *The PM’s Daughter* to address challenging themes:

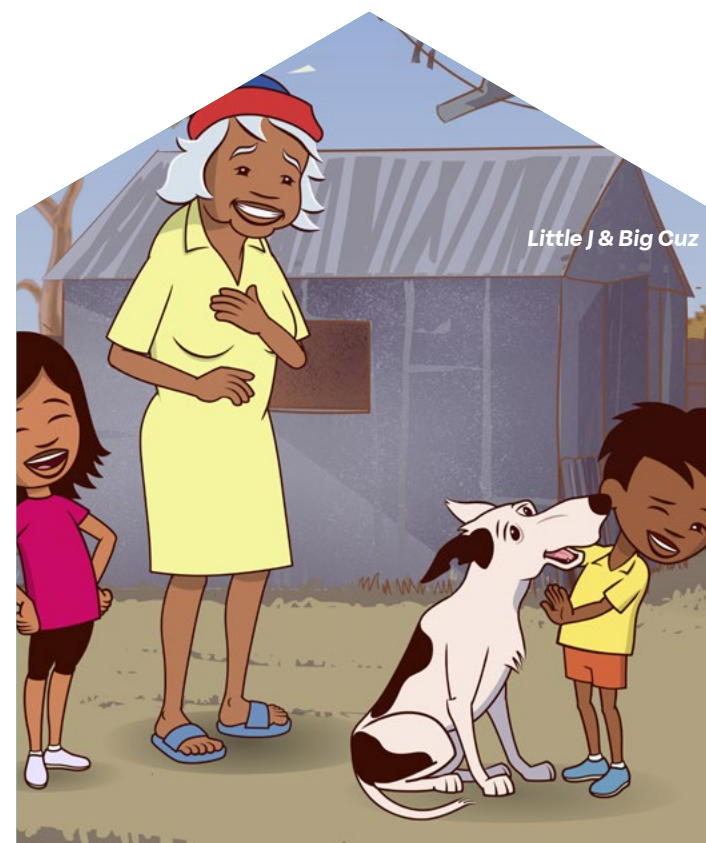
The story becomes about [protagonist Cat Parkes Pérez] and her friends uncovering threats to democracy... And also, finding a voice within the system and understanding what the system is and what your role is in it as a citizen, either to accept it or to rise up against it or find your place between those two ideas.

Kieran Hoyle, *The PM’s Daughter*

Producers argued this subversive tendency not only reflected an Australian cultural attitude, but also helped to encourage critical thinking in its young viewers.

Protecting Cultural Identity

The 2023 National Cultural Policy – Revive expressed concerns that “the ready availability of mass content produced in other countries, particularly the United States, risks drowning out the voices of Australian storytellers.”⁵³ The producers in our study called for continued government support and investment in locally produced children’s television not only from a business perspective but also to safeguard Australian culture and ensure its representation on screens. They argued that television programs have the power to shape young minds and called for diverse, engaging, and socially conscious content that reflects the richness of Australian identity.



⁵⁰ Brown, N. and Babington, B. 2015. *Family Films in Global Cinema: The World Beyond Disney*. United Kingdom: I.B. Tauris, pp. 8-10.

⁵¹ Burke, L, McIntyre, J, Balanzategui, J, & Baker, D. 2022, “Parents’ Perspectives on Australian Children’s Television in the Streaming Era,” Swinburne University of Technology. <https://doi.org/10.26185/xtt0-d294>.

⁵² Balanzategui, J. 2022. “TV horror-fantasy for children as transnational genre: *Round the Twist*, generic subversions, and quality Australian children’s television”. In *Children, Youth, and International Television*. United Kingdom: Routledge, pp. 69-88.

⁵³ Australian Government. 2023, *National Cultural Policy—Revive: a place for every story, a story for every place*, 9 February, <https://www.arts.gov.au/publications/national-cultural-policy-revive-place-every-story-story-every-place>

4. Economic Value of Australian Children's TV

Many producers in our interviews felt that the Australian children's television sector was particularly well placed to provide the talent development necessary for the wider Australian screen industry.⁵⁴ This role is particularly important given changes in the television sector that have seen a shift to shorter-run series, thereby reducing opportunities for emerging creative talent.⁵⁵ In light of crew shortages becoming a concern among Screen Producers Australia (SPA) members,⁵⁶ this study's participants believed that the career pathways and training Australian children's television provides are of crucial importance in the current Australian screen media ecology.⁵⁷

Fostering New Talent

Children's television was consistently highlighted as a key training ground for Australia's screen media sector. Barbara Stephen is the CEO of the production company Flying Bark, which produces international family-focused animation entertainment including the Australian adventure series *100% Wolf* (2020-). Stephen described how the need for more onshore talent prompted participation in a New South Wales incentive scheme called Jobs Plus as well working with vocational education providers to recruit the new talent needed:

We were able to select people from [a vocational education pilot programme] to come and do an internship within that programme, and then everyone that we selected to do an internship actually resulted in getting a job, a permanent job here.

Barbara Stephen, *100% Wolf*

Producers frequently pointed out that as a training ground for the wider screen sector the new talent working on local children's television regularly go on to careers beyond children's content, with Kieran Hoyle explaining:

For us, the big motivation there is that we are trying to fix a problem in the industry, which is that we have an ageing crew base. And we don't have the people coming through the ranks that are building up the experience to be able to take over those people in those roles and to be able to replenish our industry sustainably. And, also, a big motivator is diversifying the pool of people that are coming through and the people who have the ability and the power to tell stories... And I think the natural place that we can do that is in kids' TV... I mean, in every department, we had people who were at the point where this was the big next step in terms of a proper long form credit in a HOD role that helped them then get on to other jobs in the same role.

Kieran Hoyle, *The PM's Daughter*

Producers also asserted that supporting a local children's television industry in turn means keeping and increasing skilled screen jobs in Australia.



The PM's Daughter

⁵⁴ Balanzategui, J., Baker, D., Burke, L., & McIntyre, J. 2022, "Australian Children's Television Cultures," submission to the Consultation on Renewed National Cultural Policy, Swinburne University and RMIT University, August, pp. 2-3.

⁵⁵ Maloney, N. & Burne, P. 2021, "So Much Drama, So Little Time: Writers' Rooms in Australian Television Drama Production," in C. Batty and S. Taylor (eds.) Script Development. Cham: Palgrave Macmillan, p. 200.

⁵⁶ Keast, J. 2021, "SPA survey suggest production boom is leading to skills shortages," IF, 26 April.

⁵⁷ Lotz, A., McCutcheon, M., Potter, A., & Sanson, K. 2024. "Australian Television Drama's Uncertain Future: How Cultural Policy is Failing Australians". Queensland University of Technology, DOI: <http://doi.org/10.5204/rep.eprints.248187>

5. The ACTF: Expertise, Support, and the Need for Varied Funding

Producers highlighted the pivotal role that the Australian Children's Television Foundation (ACTF) plays in the children's television sector. Founded in 1982, the ACTF is the national non-profit children's content production and policy hub. The organisation provides support for script development, production (through distribution advances and/or equity), distribution, and promotion. The ACTF also develop educational resources for their programs. From understanding the target audience to their experience selling in local and global markets, producers recognised the ACTF's impact with terms like "fundamental", "a lifeline", and "game-changer". As one producer who wished to remain anonymous pointed out, the ACTF is different from most other funding bodies as they are involved across all phases of production and distribution:

I think where the ACTF differs is that it has funds to support either development or production, but also has an understanding of the mechanics of production and distribution which I think is unique for a 'government supported entity'. I've always thought of the ACTF as a production entity, distribution entity and funding source (all three).

Anonymous Children's TV Producer C

Producers also expressed appreciation for the ACTF's ability to offer financial support quickly, based on their expertise in the sector. Wayne Hope is the co-founder with Robyn Butler of Gristmill, a production company that creates high-end, original narrative comedy and drama for adult and child audiences. The experienced producer who worked with the ACTF on successful programs like *Little Lunch* and *InBESTigators* praised the ACTF's comparative agility in an often-slow-moving funding environment:

They've been making Australian television for 40 years and it shows. The surprising thing is you can be in a room, and they go 'Yeah, we like that, let's do it'. And it doesn't happen a lot in Australia.

Wayne Hope, *Little Lunch*

Producers also noted how the ACTF support brand development by funding subsequent seasons of programs, including programs in which they were not initially involved. This ongoing support is rare in an otherwise volatile funding environment. For example, Screen Australia provides funding for children's drama programs, but with stringent guidelines and reduced funding for a second season and does not provide funding beyond a second season unless there are "exceptional circumstances."⁵⁸ *Kangaroo Beach* producer Patrick Egerton described how the ACTF filled a key funding gap on season two of the animated series:

The ACTF came in, because it's an Australian piece of content, it needed support, there was a very strong creative and commercial argument to go to a season two... it would have been very challenging to close the finance and greenlight season two without that level of support.

Patrick Egerton, *Kangaroo Beach*

In addition to funding, the ACTF was also commended for its comprehensive support throughout the development and production process, offering editorial guidance from script development to final delivery. Joanna Werner, who has worked with the ACTF for over a decade on programs like *Dance Academy* and *Crazy Fun Park*, explained:

The ACTF are really holistically involved in the show... from scripting stage, notes on scripts, on each draft of the scripts, notes on casting, on locations, on the crew that we're assembling.

Joanna Werner, *Crazy Fun Park*

While producers identified the children's television sector as key to training and development in the screen industries (see Section 4), many commented on how the ACTF is particularly attentive to fostering new talent. This includes providing opportunities for emerging practitioners to break into the industry and develop their careers with well-established screen professionals. After a career as a child actor, including the ACTF show *Little Lunch*, Oliva Deeble created, wrote, and starred in the teen drama *More Than This* (2022). The show, which ultimately became one of the first Australian titles on global streaming service Paramount+, received development funding from the ACTF. Deeble remarked on the value of this early support:

They just trusted me and gave me the support that I needed... As a young person who's trying to learn and trying to dip my toe into everything, it's hard to get opportunities... It was so lovely to have someone believe in something that you're wanting to make... I got some incredible script mentoring.

Olivia Deeble, *More Than This*

Some producers pointed out that despite international companies investing in Australian made content, they did not always share the same interest in Australian stories as the ACTF or understand how to market these programs internationally. Producers emphasised the ACTF's significance as a key partner in international distribution, particularly in major markets such as the UK, Germany, France, and the US. They noted that the ACTF is highly regarded for its reputation in successfully distributing Australian content to global audiences. As *Kangaroo Beach* producer Patrick Egerton explained:

The ACTF have a reputation internationally for bringing quality Australian content to the market and having a really strong knowledge and connection to that content. So, to that end, it's not just the fact that they've plugged the gap with the money, and therefore, 'Great, we can greenlight our show' - it's also, we've thought about this, and we've thought, 'No, we trust the ACTF to be able to do, over the long-term, an effective job in making sales for our show'.

Patrick Egerton, *Kangaroo Beach*

The ACTF's provision of educational resources tailored to classroom settings was also valued by producers for its role in enhancing the impact of and engagement with children's programming. Producer Kirsty Stark commented on the educational resources the ACTF created for her show *First Day*, which depicts the experiences of a transgender girl attending a new school:

That teaching toolkit is incredible. I think just being able to point people to the ACTF website, to download that, has been a huge help in teachers wanting to start those conversations.

Kirsty Stark, *First Day*

Overall, producers recognised the value of having an organisation dedicated to children's television within the overall funding ecosystem, with Flying Bark CEO Barbara Stephen articulating the views of many:

I think the fact that you have, in this body, the expertise in the specific market that we play in, in the specific condition where there is no regulation... has been a lifeline that I think we needed for local content, and I would love to see that flourish... I think the ACTF has played a really critical role for kids' audiences, which is huge. Almost 20% of the population are kids.

Barbara Stephen, *100% Wolf*

⁵⁸ Screen Australia. 2024, "Children's Drama Television Production," <https://www.screenaustralia.gov.au/funding-and-support/television/production/children-s-tv-svod>

The main area of concern among producers regarding the ACTF related to its potential to operate as a gatekeeper. The strong ties between the ACTF and ABC, particularly since the removal of commercial free-to-air children's content quotas in 2020, mean that the two organisations were perceived by some producers as the only practical pathway to secure funding for children's television programs, with calls to expand funding options. As a producer who wished to remain anonymous explained:

I do really believe the ACTF have done a great job. A tremendous support to the industry... A lot of those shows, I don't think, would have been made. And it's unfair that everything's landing on the ABC as well. So, we need more content for kids, because it's 21% of our population... We want to have diversity of voice and we want to have diversity of content and we want to have diversity of funding.

Anonymous Children's TV Producer B

Some producers noted that in the past the ACTF had been better known for its live action productions, but that increased funding since 2020 was seen as enabling the ACTF to develop more animation projects:

[The ACTF] had incredible success on the live action side. But I think the funding that they've got recently has allowed them to do more in the animation side.

Barbara Stephen, 100% Wolf

Producers praised the comparative stability the ACTF offered children's television producers in a volatile funding landscape and commended the organisation's advocacy for the wider children's television sector. They also expressed appreciation for the organisation's 40-year legacy, which some producers describing how past ACTF productions such as *Round the Twist*, *Dance Academy*, and *Little Lunch* have inspired generations of Australian creatives to pursue careers in children's television.



100% Wolf

6. Impacts of Government Regulation and Funding

Australian producers of children’s screen content can seek funding through Screen Australia, the ACTF, the Producer Offset and/or the Post, Digital & VFX (PDV) Offset, and the state agencies. However, producers argue that a healthy local children’s screen industry requires sufficient scaffolding across these various options and a recognition of the importance of children’s content. One area identified by producers as evidencing inadequate resourcing is the expectation built into the funding models that children’s programs will be made for less money than adult’s programs, an assumption that producers in our study challenged. Screen Australia requires \$500,000 per broadcast hour minimum licence fee for adult drama,⁵⁹ while for children’s television drama it requires “a local presale of at least \$113,635 per broadcast half hour from a Commissioning Platform; or local presales to a total of \$130,680 per broadcast half hour from any combination of Commissioning Platforms,” which is only 52% of adult program funding.⁶⁰ In practice, this disparity has resulted in the commissioning broadcaster contributing significantly less money towards the production of a children’s series.

Producers in our interviews noted that this difference did not acknowledge the fact that quality children’s live action and animation programs are expensive to produce. They are not intrinsically cheaper to make simply by virtue of being intended for a young audience.

I don’t know why [a] children’s [program] always has less license fees. It shouldn’t. It should have the same. It costs the same to make the show. It costs the same – directors don’t come on board and expect to be paid half because it’s a children’s show.

Anonymous Children’s TV Producer B

Producers argue that it is necessary to revisit licence fees, taking into account broader, sector-wide industry rates in order to attract and maintain skilled crew and make quality children’s productions feasible.

The federal government’s removal of commercial broadcaster content quotas—firstly as a temporary COVID measure in 2020 and then as an ongoing policy position from 2021—was viewed as a significant turning point for the industry. In 2023 the National Cultural Policy – Revive noted that the number of commissioned children’s titles on free-to-air television fell from 14 in 2019-20 to seven in 2020-21, with the ABC commissioning six of these.⁶¹ As noted in the introduction, this decline has deepened in the intervening years.

While not all companies were directly impacted by these funding changes, most producers noted the sector-wide effects. Producers who previously made programs for Australian commercial networks described experiencing studio closures, mass redundancies, loss of skilled local staff, and wasted investments in equipment. The cancellation of large-scale productions, previously bolstered by quotas, also disrupted associated industries.

We had a very large production; it was a 52-episode series that got cancelled as soon as the removal of the children’s content obligations was announced, and we laid off 40 people in Hobart and ultimately shut the studio. The impact here is actually much broader than that because although we have 40 people in the studio, we also have a lot of companies that cluster around Blue Rocket, from recording studios to sound designers, to composers, down to cleaners, everything. So, the local impact here is probably closer to 80 [job losses], because there would have been maybe 20 cast involved in that as well... People are exiting in droves, really skilled people. I’ve lost people that I’ve had for 15 years.

David Gurney, Blue Rocket

Some producers asserted that with the removal of quotas, they were forced to turn down opportunities for international co-productions, with flow-on effects for the range of programs available for second window acquisition through the ABC:

A really good example is our first production, Bottersnikes & Gumbles, which is a BBC, Netflix, Seven co-commission, which then after a year went straight to the ABC. So, really Australian show, built on an Australian published IP... We have not been able to find a way to do those kinds of shows, to the detriment of the content ecosystem in Australia.

Patrick Egerton, Cheeky Little Media

Several producers suggested that even prior to the removal of quotas, the commercial free-to-air broadcasters were already making low financial investments into local children’s television and were not sufficiently active in promoting these programs. However, producers asserted that the removal of quotas exacerbated existing issues and the government had not made sufficient amendments to other available funding frameworks.

In the face of these multiple challenges, there was an urgent call from producers for regulatory intervention and reform, to ensure Australian children’s programming is properly supported across the funding ecosystem as a whole.



⁵⁹ Screen Australia. 2024, “General Television Drama Production,” <https://www.screenaustralia.gov.au/funding-and-support/television/production/general-tv-svod-production#:~:text=The%20%24500%2C000%20per%20broadcast%20hour,the%20level%20of%20further%20increases>.

⁶⁰ Screen Australia. 2024, “Children’s Drama Television Production,” <https://www.screenaustralia.gov.au/funding-and-support/television/production/children-s-tv-svod>.

⁶¹ Commonwealth of Australia. 2023. “Revive: a place for every story, a story for every place – Australia’s cultural policy for the next five years,” January, <https://www.arts.gov.au/sites/default/files/documents/national-culturalpolicy-8february2023.pdf>.

7. The Future of Australian Children's TV

Producers in the Australian children's television industry expressed a mix of optimism and concern about the future of the sector. There is a collective hope that local children's television will thrive given the increasing number of streaming platforms, but, as noted above, producers stress the need for regulation and support to continue producing high quality content. Producers warned there is a need to protect the industry from relying on cheaper overseas content and highlighted the long-term societal impact of such decisions, with Ned Lander, who has over 40 years of experience in screen production, arguing:

If we don't restructure the industry in a way that actually works, then we kiss goodbye to Australian content. And being old enough to remember life before Australian content regulations, it's a pretty dismal sort of idea of the future, particularly for kids.

Ned Lander, *Little J & Big Cuz*

Aside from implementing quotas, producers proposed a range of potential solutions to the problems facing the industry. Suggestions included better marketing and promotion of local content, increased funding, particularly for the ABC, and the creation of incentives to attract partners back to the market. Many of these solutions were captured in the following producer's words:

I would love to see us looking at, how do we better market, promote and draw attention to local content? I think kids' content, those on the ABC, does have a huge advantage because we know it's a safe place, we know that parents will choose the ABC as a kind of primary place for kids to watch content. So, I think supporting the ABC with more funding is really important as well. I think recognising that they don't have enough, really, is important... But creating diversity in the marketplace, like incentives, I think, is a really smart way to start attracting partners back into this market. And if we can deliver marketing promotion support, maybe the subsidies can extend to that so that you can have platforms and broadcasters receiving some rebates for the marketing, promotion and discoverability measures that they put in for local content. That might be a way to bring them back to the table.

Barbara Stephen, *100% Wolf*

As producers indicate, supporting local children's television into the future will require a suite of measures that take into account both changes in the market and audience behaviours.

Children also need to be able to find these local productions. The shift to shorter-run television series with fewer episodes per season means that it is more difficult to build an audience.⁶² As identified in our children's audience study, clearer labelling, organisation and searchability of Australian screen content is necessary so that children—and their adult guardians—can more easily find local programs, particularly for catalogues dominated by non-Australian content.⁶³

Concerns about the industry's current state are unequivocal, with producers describing the situation as “precarious,” “dire,” and “dangerous”. The uncertainty of future projects and the significant reduction in available opportunities have exacerbated worries about the sustainability of the industry.

Amid these concerns, there remains optimism that, despite a perceived uneven playing field and competition from heavily subsidised industries in other countries, the Australian children's television sector can find a way forward, to adapt and thrive in the streaming era.

⁶² Maloney, N & Burne, P. 2021, “So Much Drama, So Little Time: Writers' Rooms in Australian Television Drama Production,” in C. Batty and S. Taylor (eds.) *Script Development*. Cham: Palgrave Macmillan, p. 200.

⁶³ Balanzategui, J, Baker, D, Clift, G, Burke, L, & McIntyre, J. 2024, “Australian Children's Streaming Video Platform Habits, Fluencies, and Literacies”. Swinburne University of Technology and RMIT University. DOI 10.60836/p6re-bv50

Conclusion

In examining the landscape of Australian children's television from the perspectives of 23 active producers a detailed understanding of the sector has emerged.

The overarching picture these perspectives illustrate is of an industry at a critical crossroads, navigating the multifaceted impacts of evolving technologies and viewing habits, local and international market dynamics, and policy shifts. The findings of this research are designed to help all stakeholders traverse this period of intense technological and legislative change, as Australian children's television is reconceptualised for the streaming era.

Key Producer Perspectives included:

- Streaming platforms represent opportunities for funding and distributing children's content, but several participants cautioned against overestimating their capacity to fill the void left by traditional broadcasters
- Content quotas on global streaming services with ringfenced funding for children's content is a necessary regulatory protection
- Australian children's television contributes to social cohesion and a shared sense of cultural identity
- Despite the global success of some Australian programs, support is still needed for content that may not have international appeal but addresses the specific needs of Australian children, such as First Nations content
- Australian children's content has qualities that distinguish local programs from overseas equivalents
- Local children's television fosters new talent and builds capacity for the wider Australian screen industries
- The ACTF is recognised as a pillar of the Australian children's television industry, providing expert advice, crucial financial support, and international sales and distribution
- The removal of children's content quotas in 2020 occurred suddenly, without adequate mechanisms in place, and has negatively impacted several companies resulting in a reduction in local children's television
- A multifaceted approach is needed to support Australian children's television into the future, in terms of both production and discoverability



Appendix A:

Study Participants

Producer Name	Production Company	Key Titles	Interview Date
Andrea Denholm*	Tony Ayres Productions	<i>Spooky Files</i>	01 Apr 24
Barbara Stephen	Flying Bark Productions	<i>100% Wolf; Tales from Outer Suburbia</i>	17 Mar 23
Dan Walkington	Butter Media	<i>Built to Survive</i>	25 Nov 23
David Gurney	Blue Rocket Productions	<i>Little J & Big Cuz; Keeko</i>	29 Nov 23
Gillian Carr	Moody Street Kids	<i>Planet Lulin; Flea-Bitten!</i>	04 Dec 23
Joanna Werner	Werner Film Productions	<i>Dance Academy; Crazy Fun Park</i>	20 May 22
Kate Gorman	Baby Banksia	<i>More Than This</i>	13 Dec 21
Kieran Hoyle	Fremantle	<i>The PM's Daughter</i>	20 Apr 23
Kirsty Stark	Epic Films	<i>First Day</i>	22 Nov 21
Ned Lander	Ned Lander Media	<i>Little J & Big Cuz</i>	4 Apr 23
Nicholas Verso†		<i>Crazy Fun Park</i>	20 May 22
Olivia Deeble	Baby Banksia	<i>More Than This</i>	13 Dec 21
Patrick Egerton	Cheeky Little Media	<i>Kangaroo Beach; Vegesaurs</i>	10 Mar 23
Peter Viska	Viskatoons	<i>Jar Dwellers SOS</i>	15 Jun 22
Rachel Clements	Brindle Films	<i>MaveriX</i>	10 Dec 21
Robyn Butler‡	Gristmill	<i>Little Lunch; InBESTigators</i>	29 Nov 21
Stuart Menzies	Werner Film Productions	<i>Crazy Fun Park</i>	20 May 22
Tom Taylor		<i>The Deep</i>	16 Aug 22
Vanna Morosini	Flying Kite Pictures	<i>Are You Tougher Than Your Ancestors?</i>	18 Nov 21
Wayne Hope‡	Gristmill	<i>Little Lunch; InBESTigators</i>	29 Nov 21

*Interview took place via email
†Creator/writer/director of Crazy Fun Park, with other producer credits
‡Two participant interview

Three of the 23 producers who participated in this research wished to remain anonymous and are not included in this list.

About the Authors

Djoymi Baker is Senior Lecturer in Media and Cinema Studies at RMIT University and formerly worked in the Australian television industry. She has published work on children’s television history, family television in the streaming era, and intergenerational television fandom. Her other research interests include film and television genres, myth in popular culture, and the ethics of representing the non-human on screen, from animals to aliens. Djoymi is the author of *To Boldly Go: Marketing the Myth of Star Trek* (IB Tauris, 2018) and the co-author of *The Encyclopedia of Epic Films* (with Santas, Wilson and Colavito, Rowman & Littlefield, 2014) and *Netflix, Dark Fantastic Genres and Intergenerational Viewing* (with Balanzategui and Sandars, Routledge, 2023). Her work can be found in leading journals such as *Critical Studies in Television*, *Celebrity Studies*, *Convergence*, and *Studies in Documentary Film*.

Liam Burke is Associate Professor and discipline leader of Cinema and Screen Studies at Swinburne University of Technology, Australia, where he is also a member of the Centre for Transformative Media Technologies. Liam has published widely on comic books, animation, adaptation, transmedia storytelling, and media and national identity. His books include *The Comic Book Film Adaptation*, *Superhero Movies*, and the edited collections *Fan Phenomena Batman*, *The Superhero Symbol*, and *Superheroes Beyond*. Prior to entering academia Liam worked for several arts organisations including the Irish Film & Television Academy (IFTA).

Jessica Balanzategui is Associate Professor in Media at RMIT University. Her research examining how technological change impacts entertainment cultures, industries, and aesthetics has been widely published in top international journals including *New Media and Society*, *International Journal of Cultural Studies*, *Television and New Media*, *Convergence: The International Journal of Research into New Media Technologies* and *The Journal of Visual Culture*. Jessica’s current focus is screen genres *for* and *about* children in the streaming video era. She was awarded an Australian Research Council Industry Fellowship to examine how children discover content on streaming platforms. She is the author of the monographs *Netflix, Dark Fantastic Genres and Intergenerational Viewing: Family Watch Together TV* (with Baker and Sandars, Routledge, 2023) and *The Uncanny Child in Transnational Cinema* (Amsterdam UP, 2018), Founding Editor of Amsterdam University Press’s book series, Horror and Gothic Media Cultures, and Founder of the Streaming Industries and Genres Network (SIGN).

Joanna McIntyre is a Senior Lecturer in Media Studies and the Course Director of the Bachelor of Media and Communication at Swinburne University of Technology, Australia. Joanna has published widely on the topics of Australian screen history, Australian screen cultures, gender, celebrity, queer and trans representation, and Australian “national identities.” Her research interests include children’s media and its intersections with issues of gender, celebrity, and identity. Joanna has published in leading international journals in her field, including *Journal of Children and Media*, *Feminist Media Studies*, *Celebrity Studies Journal*, and *The European Journal of Cultural Studies*. Her edited collections include *Gender and Australian Celebrity Culture* (Routledge, 2021) and *The Routledge Companion to Gender and Celebrity* (Routledge, 2025). Her news articles in *The Conversation* have over 1.4 million readers.

Estelle Boyle is an early career researcher in media and communications with expertise in digital media, migration, and social and digital inclusion. Her research explores how digital technologies shape experiences of belonging and accessibility for diverse communities. She is a research assistant in Swinburne University of Technology’s School of Social Sciences, Media, Film and Education, and a teaching assistant at Monash University and the University of Melbourne.

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