



Australian
Children's
Television
Foundation

Senate Inquiry National Cultural Policy

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Little J & Big Cuz
Old Dog Pictures, Ned Lander Media

Australian Children's Television Foundation
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The Australian Children's Television Foundation (ACTF) welcomes the opportunity to contribute to the Senate Inquiry into Australia's National Cultural Policy: *Revive: a place for every story, a story for every place (Revive)*.

About Us

We are a non-profit company funded by the Commonwealth Government and the governments of all States and Territories of Australia.

We occupy a singular position at the intersection of Australian culture, education, social impact and the international screen business – investing in and advocating for children's media that delivers on our aspirations for the children's audience. We invest in the development and production of children's content, nurture and scaffold new producers, distribute children's screen content all over the world and develop ancillary education resources to support the use of the programs we support in the classroom.

Australia's National Cultural Policy: Revive

As noted by the Chair of the Senate's Environment and Communications References Committee, Senator Sarah Hanson-Young, *Revive* marks a "significant turning point" and is "an opportunity to get it right". The over-arching premise of *Revive* is a clear acknowledgement that arts, culture and the creative industries play a key role in our economy and to our national sense of self and identity. They are our nation's soul.

Revive includes a Case Study of the children's series *Thalu*, created and produced in the Pilbara by local production company Weeriana Street Media, for broadcast on the ABC and NITV. It quotes the ACTF submission as saying:

When Australian children see their lives reflected on screen, they experience recognition and affirmation, with characters and stories that help them imagine all the possibilities for someone like them. Children's screen content is both a mirror and a window in a child's life, with the capacity to influence in profound and positive ways – to bolster a child's own sense of identity, as well as to encourage them to walk in someone else's shoes and experience what it might be like to be them. In this way, Australian children's screen content is truly nation building.

Australian children's television is an exemplar of everything *Revive* is striving to achieve.

Australian children's television intersects and engages with all five pillars:

Exploring First Nations histories, cultures and experience

Children's television commissioners, especially NITV and the ABC, as well as producers, are embracing First Nations children's content in multiple ways.

First Nations characters, themes and knowledge are included in a wide range of current general children's series including shows like *MaveriX*, *The Deep*, *Space Nova*, *Are You Tougher Than Your Ancestors* and many more.

First Nations writers, directors, producers and production companies have been responsible for the creation and development of shows including *Little J & Big Cuz* (now up to 4 seasons), *Thalu*, *Red Dirt Riders*, *Built To Survive* and *Barrumbi Kids*.

The ABC and NITV are regularly co-commissioning shows such as *Little J & Big Cuz*, *Thalu* and *Red Dirt Riders*.

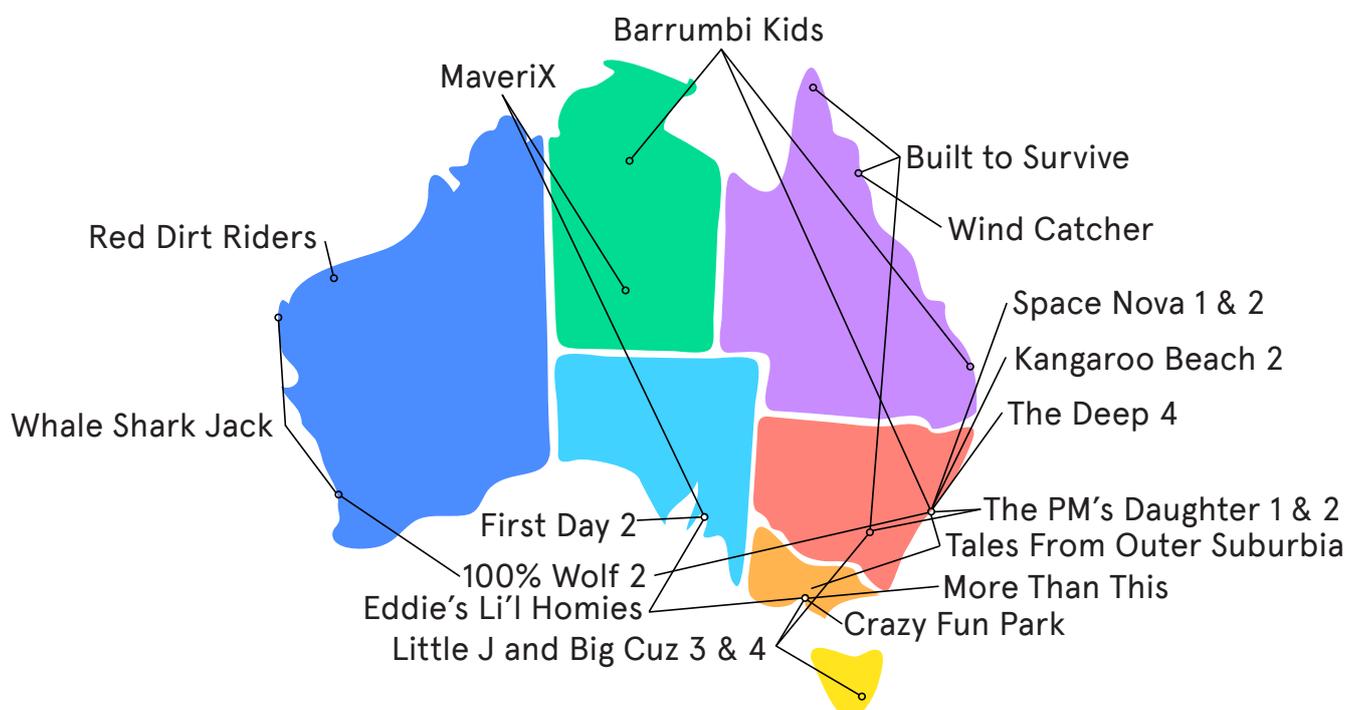
NITV has created a dedicated children's television timeslot, called Jarjums, where the children's shows it co-commissions are screened, alongside its exclusive commissions like major children's television drama *Barrumbi Kids*.

NITV and Netflix have recently joined together in their first co-commission, *Eddie's Li'l Homies*.

This ever growing and broad array of First Nations children's content is showcasing First Nations talent and expertise in front of and behind the camera, providing opportunities for First Nations children in remote, rural and urban settings to see themselves on screen, and all Australian children to experience First Nations children and culture firsthand.

Finding a place for every story

Children's screen content production is not confined to one or two Australian cities, or one or two producers. Over the last two years, for example, the ACTF has supported over 18 different children's series produced in every State and Territory. Australian producers and production companies are producing children's series for pre-schoolers, the 7 – 12s, teens and young adults; delivering adventure, fantasy, drama, and collectively unpacking all the many different ways there are to be Australian.



Building and enabling capacity for careers in the screen sector

Children's live action drama and animation production provide outstanding practical training opportunities for screen professionals in the early stages of their career, as commissioning platforms, broadcasters and producers are often more willing to try out new talent and encourage people to step up to the next level in their career on children's shows.

In an age where drama production generally is going very high end, and longer running primetime series are few and far between, opportunities for emerging screen professionals to gain experience are scarce. Children's television makes a vital contribution to the screen sector in this regard. Recent productions that the ACTF has been supporting have been considerable talent escalators. For example, *Barrumbi Kids*, a Tamarind Tree Pictures/Ambience production shot in the Northern Territory in 2021 provided career escalation for more than 60 people. This included:

- Six people attached to post-production roles and an AFTRS student as an Art Department Attachment;
- Seven of the twelve lead cast engaged in their first professional acting role;
- Two emerging Indigenous directors receiving their first episodic drama credit;
- A new writer receiving their first TV credit; and
- Seventeen crew members engaged in either their first professional crew role or promoted to a more senior role.

Supported by strong cultural institutions and infrastructure

The screen industry, in Australia and around the world, is in a state of permanent transition. The rise of the international streaming services have brought increased competition to traditional free-to-air broadcasters. Old models of funding and regulation, as well as audience viewing habits, are being turned on their head. Audiences are consuming content – especially high end drama – in ever greater numbers, but audiences are fragmenting on account of all that choice.

Australian children's screen content, is, as it always has been, especially vulnerable within that broader context. Put simply, no one really wants to be required to screen or commission children's content and no one wants to pay what it's worth.

Commercial broadcasters and streaming platforms don't want to embrace formal obligations to Australian content, and definitely not to children's content. Even the ABC, the absolute leader in this space, does not want specific obligations toward the children's audience in return for funding for this content, arguing in previous submissions to various inquiries that it can't be reduced to being a "market failure broadcaster". And when it comes to commissioning children's content, the licence fees commissioning platforms pay for that content will be half or less than half what they pay for adult content, even if the cost of production is the same.

For all these reasons, Australian children's content must be supported by a robust policy framework which includes strong institutions mandated to support Australian children's content and obligations to deliver children's content from broadcast and subscription platforms.

The support of public broadcasters, obligations for commercial platforms, availability of funding via the production offset and Screen Australia are all essential in supporting Australian children's television, as is the role of the Australian Children's Television Foundation.

Engaging the audience at home and abroad

Australian children's television is hugely successful with audiences in Australia and all over the world.

Australian children and families gravitate to Australian children's shows.

Little Lunch (2015) and *The Inbestigators* (2019), created by Gristmill for the ABC, are great examples of the longevity of children's television shows, where the impact is felt over many years, not just at the time of initial release. Together these programs have generated over 56 million plays on the ABC's iview platform, a number which continues to climb. Overseas, *The Inbestigators* is showing worldwide and *Little Lunch* is currently broadcast in Israel, United Kingdom, Republic of Ireland New Zealand, Hongkong, Vietnam, USA, Canada, Taiwan and South Africa.

Australian adults today remember the Australian children's shows that they grew up with fondly.¹

Australian children's shows are also successfully exported all over the world. With broadcasters including the BBC, NHK Japan, ARD Germany, ZDF Germany, France Television, RTVE Spain, NHK Japan, EBS Korea, CBC Canada all regularly licensing Australian children's shows.

Because Australian children's television is reaching its audience so well, it is also contributing to broader national objectives, as it:

- Communicates shared common values – respectful relationships and respect for all other people, problem solving, resilience;
- Is a leader in addressing diversity, inclusion and equality;
- Is proactive and progressive, assisting with strengthening multiculturalism, social inclusion, First Nations' representation, countering racism and strengthening democracy;
- Enables children to feel seen and heard, consistent with our obligations under the United Nations Charter on the Rights of the Child to provide access to media which is linguistically and culturally relevant to them.

Children's television, and the ancillary education materials that support its use in the classroom, is addressing:

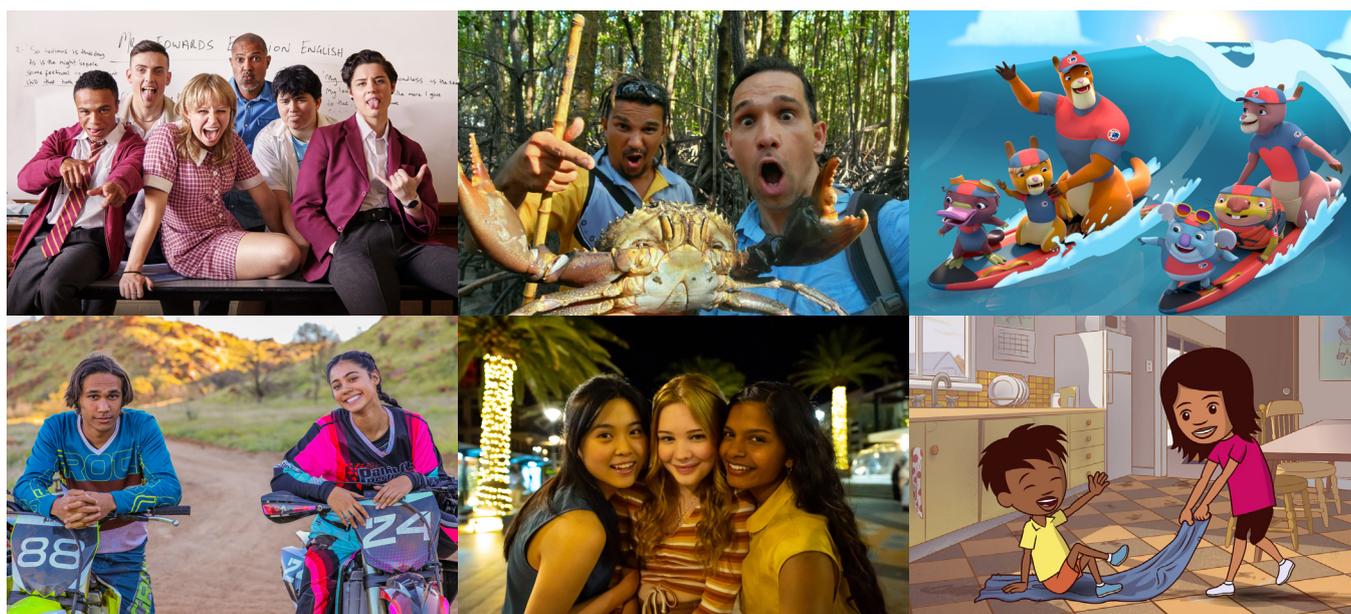
- The politics of the playground and strategies for getting along with one another, in programs such as *Little Lunch*, *Hardball* and *The Inbestigators*;
- First Nations histories, cultures and experience in programs such as *Thalu*, *Little J & Big Cuz* and *Barrumbi Kids*;
- Teamwork, leadership, collaboration and ethical thinking in programs such as *MaveriX*, *Mustangs FC*, *Kangaroo Beach*;
- Civics and citizenship, democracy, justice, leadership and diversity in programs such as the *PM's Daughter* and *First Day*;
- Imagination, fantasy, the natural world, our skies and our seas, in programs such as *Space Nova*, *The Deep* and *Built to Survive*;
- Mental health, peer group and friendship, grief, anxiety, family, consent and respectful relationships in programs such as *More Than This*, *First Day* and *Crazy Fun Park*

¹ Swinburne University and RMIT Research, unpublished (2023)

Australian children's television needs joined up support via a suite of interconnected policy levers to ensure that it continues to deliver these outcomes. It is essential that our National Cultural Policy ensure:

- Continued support for the public broadcasters, ABC and SBS/NITV. *Revive* acknowledges their critical role in the life of our nation. It is fair to say that the ABC and NITV currently do the heavy lifting in the children's space. They should be acknowledged for this and it should be an important consideration in their funding from Government. In return, there should be transparency and commitments made around the provision of Australian children's content on their services.
- Audiences expect (and parents tell us they search for) children's content on commercial platforms, especially SVODs.² *Revive* has confirmed that obligations around Australian content on streaming platforms will be introduced from 1 July 2024. Those obligations should include Australian children's content. We await the release of the proposed models and will participate in the consultation process with interest.
- The Australian content that is supported by Australian taxpayers on all platforms should be visible and easily discoverable to Australian audiences. The Commonwealth Government is proposing to address this issue through its Prominence Framework reforms, and the ACTF strongly supports all measures proposed to make Australian free-to-air broadcasters and their FVOD services visible on Smart TVs. The ACTF is suggesting that the Commonwealth also explore the viability of a children's content App, which would aggregate all the Australian children's screen content across all services, making this content highly visible and easy for families to discover.
- Continued support for strong institutions. This must include Screen Australia and it must include the Australian Children's Television Foundation. This support is not addressed in *Revive*.

The ACTF would be delighted to make a presentation to the Senate Inquiry to discuss the role that Australian children's screen content plays in our nation and the unique challenges and opportunities that it presents.



² Parents' Perspectives on Australian Children's Television in the Streaming Era' (April 2022), available here: <https://actf.com.au/research>.