

A New Look at Culture – Towards the State’s first Arts, Culture & Creative Industries Policy



The Australian Children’s Television Foundation (ACTF) welcomes the opportunity to contribute to the public consultation: *A New Look at Culture – Towards the State’s first Arts, Culture & Creative Industries Policy*.

Introduction

We welcome the commitment of the NSW Government to create an ambitious Arts, Culture and Creative Industries Policy (NSW Culture Policy). An inclusive NSW Culture Policy should champion and include children and young people as both audience and creators.

Children and young people deserve access to the Arts in all its forms, for the purposes of expression, entertainment and education. They are also the future of our cultural sector and their capacity to contribute is dependent on their experience of the Arts in childhood. **We recommend that the NSW Culture Policy recognise children and young people as an important audience in their own right and as key drivers of the future of the State; as well as the role of the Arts in developing children as resilient, proud, healthy and connected to the Arts and Culture sector.** Having made that overall comment, the rest of our submission is focussed on screen content and the importance of providing quality, locally produced screen content for children.

About Us

We are a non-profit company funded by the Commonwealth Government with contributions from the governments of all States and Territories of Australia. The NSW contribution is via the Department of Education.

Our Purpose: To make Australian children’s lives better through screen content that reflects our culture and values.

Our values: Inclusion, diversity, resilience, imagination, having fun and striving to be our best selves.

Our Vision: High quality Australian children’s screen content reaching and connecting with children on all the platforms they engage with.

Opportunities

The ACTF recommends the NSW Government prioritise and champion NSW children’s content as a key component of the local screen sector, for the value it brings to both the children’s audience and the screen sector eco-system.

Australian children consume screen content at an impressionable age. Australian children’s television is entertaining and educating children and young people, as well as contributing to broader cultural objectives, such as communicating shared values, championing diversity and inclusion as well as representing multiculturalism and First Nations peoples. Locally produced children’s content is teaching and reinforcing socially and culturally relevant life skills and knowledge in a range of settings. For example, the pre-school animation series *Kangaroo Beach* – produced by NSW based production company Cheeky Little Media – highlights the importance of water safety awareness and education for Australian families; *Little J and Big Cuz* – produced by NSW based Ned Lander Media – introduces

First Nations children to the world of school with relatable characters, language and family members, and other children to First Nations culture and families; and *Space Nova* – produced by NSW production company SLR Productions – introduces astronomy to children in an imaginative and exciting way. The live action thriller series *The PM's Daughter* – produced by NSW production company Fremantle Media – promotes civics and citizenship.

Children's television series such as all those mentioned, are also an important contributor to the screen industry eco-system, unlocking early career opportunities for the cast, crew and key creative talent who work on these projects.

Removing Barriers: Unlocking the full potential of local children's screen content

Despite locally produced children's screen content being so valuable, its creation is disadvantaged because it does not command the levels of investment from broadcasters or others that adult content does. It is the clearest example of market failure in the screen sector, but also the greatest example of public value. Australia is a world leader in the production of high-quality children's screen content, but the market in which it operates is undergoing dramatic transformation.

The screen industry is in a state of permanent transition. Old models of funding and regulation, as well as audience viewing habits, are constantly changing. It is therefore vital that the NSW Culture Policy supports emerging creatives through the provision of training opportunities, as well as projects themselves via investment from organisations such as Screen NSW.

Maintain and Extend Pathways

The ACTF recommends that the NSW Cultural Policy celebrates and extends the capability of the children's screen industry in NSW, by providing Screen NSW with dedicated funding to enable it to provide more substantial support for children's content. 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.

Recent NSW productions have been considerable talent escalators. For example, Fremantle Media (NSW) produced *The PM's Daughter Series 2*, a series which gave an emerging female producer her first co-producer role amongst other opportunities:

“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 – SERIES 1 & 2, EXECUTIVE PRODUCER, FREMANTLE MEDIA



The ACTF recently supported animation series 100% Wolf Series 2 – The Book Of Hath. The Sydney based production company Flying Bark Productions decided, after challenging Covid experiences regarding overseas based animators, to bring more of the animation work back to Australia. With support from the New South Wales government, Flying Bark Productions expanded its full-time staff numbers and added a new floor to increase capacity, as well as supporting extensive training for new recruits. This production is a great example of the training and career opportunities that exist for local creatives when the work is based in NSW rather than overseas. However, it is important to note that these kinds of training initiatives increase production budgets.

“We looked for a model for the second season that would allow us to bring much more work back onshore. It was to safeguard against what could maybe come down the road with Covid, but also because the ACTF and myself really shared this view that in order to grow the industry, regardless of where government policy was going to sit, we needed to be able to produce quality animation much more onshore, and to build up our reputation globally.”

BARBARA STEPHEN, 100% WOLF, FLYING BARK PRODUCTIONS, PRODUCER

The NSW Culture Policy needs to ensure support for both training and investment in children’s screen content, to maintain a development and production pipeline.

First Nations First

The ACTF recommends the NSW Culture Policy provide support, industry pathways and investment in First Nations children’s screen content across all NSW nations and language groups.

First Nations characters, themes and knowledge are included in a wide range of current children’s series produced in total or in part in NSW, including shows like Barrumbi Kids, The Deep, Space Nova, Built to Survive, Bushwhacked, and Are You Tougher Than Your Ancestors. First Nations writers, directors, producers and production companies have been responsible for the creation and development of shows including Little J & Big Cuz, Thalu, Red Dirt Riders, Built To Survive and Barrumbi Kids.

This ever-growing catalogue of First Nations children’s content is showcasing talent and expertise in front of and behind the camera, providing opportunities for First Nations children to see themselves on screen, and all Australian children to be afforded rich cultural experiences from First Nations stories.

How we can grow local, national and international audiences

Supporting Australian stories for children is a long-term investment, as children's content has a long life. The audience is refreshing itself every few years with a new audience of children discovering shows for the first time. Australian children's television is hugely successful with audiences in Australia and it travels all over the world. For example, *Kangaroo Beach*, produced by NSW based production company Cheeky Little Media, is amongst the top 5 ABC KIDS programs in Australia and is showing in multiple countries overseas.

Australian quality children's shows are successfully finding an international audience with overseas broadcasters and streamers regularly licensing Australian children's shows.

Successful Australian children's dramas like *Dance Academy* (Werner Film Productions), *Bushwhacked* (Mint Pictures), *Hardball* (Northern Pictures), *The Unlisted* (produced by Angie Fielder & Polly Staniford), *Double Trouble* (produced by Terry Jennings & Rachel Clements), *Ready for This* (Werner Film Productions & Blackfella Films) showcase NSW's natural beauty, widely envied lifestyle and vibrant society, encouraging visitors from Australia and overseas.

Using local screen content in Australian schools and creating educational resources that link Australian children's television with the Australian curriculum enables teachers to use engaging quality screen content in the classroom and introduces Australian screen content to a new audience of children in Australian schools. The ACTF collaborates closely with different teams within the NSW Education Department and it would be appropriate for the NSW Culture Policy to recognise the value and potential of that relationship.

Recommendations

There are nearly 2 million children and young people residing in NSW. It is essential that the NSW Culture Policy champions children as an audience, deserving of screen content made especially for them. We recommend that the NSW Culture Policy:

- champions children and young people as an audience and deserving of screen content made especially for them;
- supports First Nations story telling on screen for children and young people by enabling pathways for First Nations creatives and investment to tell these stories;
- maintains and extends pathways into the screen industry by supporting children's television projects as talent escalators;
- recognises the importance of Screen NSW and allocates additional dedicated funding for quality local children's content; and
- recognises the value and potential of the Australian Children's Television Foundation relationship with the NSW Department of Education.

The ACTF would be delighted to make a presentation and discuss the role that Australian children's screen content plays and the unique challenges and opportunities that it presents in relation to the NSW Culture Policy.

Case Study: Little J & Big Cuz

The pre-school series *Little J & Big Cuz*, produced by NSW based Ned Lander Media, is set in a remote Australian community which will look familiar to many rural and remote children and their families and depicts First Nations children participating at school in an authentic way. "Guided by their wise and wonderful Nanna, their enthusiastic teacher Ms Chen, and accompanied by their Old Dog, Little J and his Big Cuz navigate lessons of bravado and humility, impulsiveness and patience, shame and confidence, selfhood and empathy...themes that are common to childhood everywhere."¹

"Little J, Big Cuz and their classmates 'code switch' – speaking mainstream English in the classroom. When they're with Nanna and on Country, they speak more Aboriginal English. The differences are subtle, but it's an additional element of authenticity".² The series has also been translated into First languages, including Wiradjuri. This language version was created on Country with voice talent led by Letetia Harris, Wiradjuri language teacher at Charles Sturt University, Wagga Wagga (central NSW).

*We still have a long way to go but I believe a cartoon series like Little J & Big Cuz will benefit children and teachers alike. The fact that every episode has free downloadable resources for teachers is perfect. Let's be honest, it is hard for some teachers to teach Indigenous Studies, especially if they had the same school education as me. Many are afraid so they avoid it. This series is a supportive way for them to educate children about school life, culture, community and country.*³

Positive representation in shows like *Little J & Big Cuz* celebrate and strengthen the sense of identity of First Nations children and support all learners' emotional wellbeing.⁴ A show like *Little J & Big Cuz* also serves a role in preparing young children for the environments they will interact with outside of the home, including their learning settings, for example preparing children for school by introducing them to the routines and expectations of a classroom.

"... My class are tricky. They have behavioural, processing, emotional, learning and sensory needs... Every one of them relates to one or more of the characters. Every one of them had a "favourite one" before the end of the first episode... We have used your show to unpack social problems, to explain complicated emotions, to learn about safety and to learn of Aboriginal peoples' perspective and culture... Thanks for giving them an authentic identity and narrative to look to, and thanks for giving us the means of exploring our best selves."

ELISSA, PRIMARY TEACHER, CANBERRA, IN AN EMAIL TO THE PRODUCER OF LITTLE J AND BIG CUZ



¹ David Knox 'Airdate: Little J and Big Cuz NITV will premiere Australian TV's first contemporary children's animation series with an Indigenous perspective.' TV Tonight (24 April 2017) at <https://tvtonight.com.au/2017/04/airdate-little-j-and-big-cuz.html>.

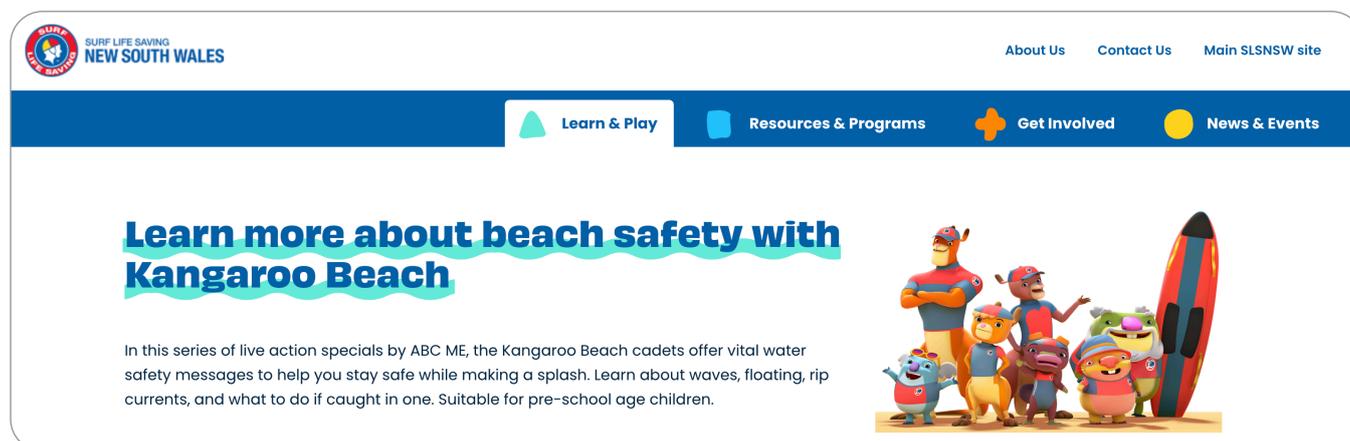
² Clare Madsen 'Little J & Big Cuz Press Kit' (2017) page 13 at https://www.littlejandbigcuz.com.au/uploads/files/littlej_presskit.pdf.

Case Study: Kangaroo Beach

Locally produced children's content is a vehicle for teaching and reinforcing socially and culturally relevant life skills. A good example of this is the pre-school animation series *Kangaroo Beach*, produced by NSW based Cheeky Little Media. The show highlights the importance of water safety awareness. Four lifeguard cadets, under the guidance of experienced lifeguards, gain foundational water safety skills that will help keep themselves and others safe all summer. While early years children are the target audience for this series, its health and safety messages are also relayed to family members who co-view the program with children. Surf Life Saving Australia has endorsed the series by being a key partner in the production.

"As we're well into summer now a lot of us are spending a lot more time at the beach and it's so important to learn about beach safety. Children definitely learn from the things they watch on TV so Kangaroo Beach is perfect for this."

LINDSEY O'HALLORAN, ME, HIM, THE DOG AND A BABY (23 JULY 2022)



The screenshot shows the website for Surf Life Saving New South Wales. The header includes the organization's logo and navigation links: 'About Us', 'Contact Us', and 'Main SLSNSW site'. A blue navigation bar contains four menu items: 'Learn & Play' (with a green triangle icon), 'Resources & Programs' (with a blue square icon), 'Get Involved' (with an orange plus icon), and 'News & Events' (with a yellow circle icon). The main content area features a large blue heading: 'Learn more about beach safety with Kangaroo Beach'. Below the heading is a paragraph: 'In this series of live action specials by ABC ME, the Kangaroo Beach cadets offer vital water safety messages to help you stay safe while making a splash. Learn about waves, floating, rip currents, and what to do if caught in one. Suitable for pre-school age children.' To the right of the text is an illustration of the Kangaroo Beach characters, including a lifeguard, a dog, and several colorful kangaroo-like characters, standing next to a surfboard.

Image Source: <https://beachsafetyhub.org.au/learn-&-play/learn-play-for-kids/beach-safety-for-kids/>

³ Shelley Ware 'I never saw myself represented on TV growing up. But my kids do now' Mamamia (15 May 2017) at <https://www.mamamia.com.au/role-models-for-indigenous-children/>.

⁴ Moyle, K. 'Final report and case studies - Little J & Big Cuz: A school readiness initiative' (2019) Camberwell, Australia: Australian Council for Educational Research page 31 at <https://research.acer.edu.au/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1000&context=littlebigcuz>.