



31 March 2017

The House Standing Committee on Communications and the Arts
PO Box 6021
Parliament House
Canberra ACT 2600

Inquiry into the Australian film and television industry

The federation of Ethnic Communities' Councils of Australia (FECCA) is the national peak body representing Australia's culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) communities and their organisations. FECCA provides advocacy, develops policy and promotes issues on behalf of its constituency to Government and the broader community. FECCA supports multiculturalism, community harmony, social justice and the rejection of all forms of discrimination and racism so as to build a productive, diverse and culturally rich Australian society. FECCA's policies are developed around the concepts of empowerment and inclusion and are formulated with the common good of all Australians in mind.

FECCA welcomes the opportunity provided by the House Standing Committee on Communications and the Arts to provide input into the Australian film and television industry.

Key Message

Australia is home to one of the world's richest film histories, featuring a unique style developed over more than a century. Today, Australian cinema is more complex and diverse than ever, exploring Australian peoples and cultures from a varied range of viewpoints. Still, much remains to be done before the media represents multicultural Australia. The film and television industry should aim to reflect multicultural Australia.

By increasing diversity, the Australian film and television industry can be part of the development of a resilient, cohesive and inclusive society, and play a crucial role in a robust democracy. Through reflecting Australia's diversity, the film and television industry can also reap benefits such as a broader network of viewers and more engaged audiences.

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Key Recommendations

FECCA urges Australia's film and television industry to reflect multicultural Australia. Despite improvements in recent years, the industry has acknowledged the lack of real diversity reflecting the broad multicultural landscape in Australia.¹ FECCA urges the industry to reflect on these gaps and address them appropriately. FECCA suggests the following:

- **Australia's film and television industry should reflect greater diversity**
- **Screen Australia should increase awareness within the media about their role as a conduit for a cohesive Australia.**
- **The film and television industry should prioritise diversity in its workforce as a means of encouraging a broader range of perspectives and enhancing creative energy, to be represented through future productions.**
- **Screen Australia should prioritise and promote its international co-production programs to encourage economic sustainability, increase cross-cultural collaboration and facilitate broader creative input.**

Increased diversity

With one in four Australians born overseas, and another one in four with at least one parent born overseas,² FECCA believes the Australian media must diversify to reflect Australia's cultural and linguistic diversity and to include culturally and linguistically diverse voices in its reporting. In a study released by Screen Australia in 2016, *Seeing Ourselves: Reflections on Diversity in TV Drama*, data showed that only 18% of main characters in the period between 2011 and 2015 were from non-Anglo Celtic backgrounds, compared to 32% of the population.³ While there has been increased diversity on Australian TV and in other parts of the media in recent years such, for example a greater number of journalists, actors and comedians of CALD backgrounds⁴, there is still a long way to go before media is truly representative of the population. Media has the capacity to create change, and through increased focus on diversity in the industry, film and television can play a big part in promoting positive messages regarding Australia's cultural, linguistic, intersectional and gender diversity.

Recent successes have demonstrated an appetite for diversity in scripts.⁵ With increased diversity in the Australian population together with increased access to internet and satellite TV, the Australian film and television industry must broaden the content of its storytelling in order to maintain and increase its audience.

An important means of increasing on screen diversity is to encourage wider diversity in the content-producing workforce. By developing diverse teams behind the scenes, the media industry can better understand, reflect and appeal to ethno-cultural communities. As quoted by SBS Managing Director, Michael Ebeid:

¹ Seeing ourselves: Reflections on diversity in TV drama, Screen Australia 2016

² Caputo, Joseph OAM JP, *Australian Mosaic*, issue 44, FECCA 2016

³ The study analysed 199 dramas that aired between 2011 and 2015 inclusive, see <https://www.screenaustralia.gov.au/sa/newsroom/news/2016/mr-160824-study-of-diversity-on-tv-released> and <https://www.screenaustralia.gov.au/getmedia/157b05b4-255a-47b4-bd8b-9f715555fb44/TV-Drama-Diversity.pdf> for more information.

⁴ Leewai, Jackie, Building future leaders through careers in media, *Australian Mosaic*, issue 45, forthcoming, FECCA 2017

⁵ Seeing ourselves: Reflections on diversity in TV drama, Screen Australia 2016

'Put more beautiful people of colour on TV and connect viewers in ways which transcend race and unite us.' A sentiment so elegantly expressed by Miranda Tapsell at the 2015 TV Week Logie Awards and echoed further by Waleed Ali in his Gold Logie speech this year.

*For over 40 years, driving cultural understanding and promoting the benefits of diversity through our programs has been at the heart of SBS. We are motivated by our belief that connecting communities and inspiring greater understanding can shift perceptions of 'difference' and normalise diversity within our society.*⁶

Acknowledging the success for SBS with the above diversity measures⁷, Ebeid has reflected on the need to do better:

*...because without this diversity in our media organisations, we can't expect tangible change to the diversity of our creative output. SBS is pursuing ongoing improvements to our commissioning and production frameworks, together with strategies to even further diversify our organisation. We are also working on a new program to provide opportunities for "behind-the-camera" talent from diverse backgrounds in SBS productions, with our independent production partners.*⁸

FECCA commends SBS for the 2016 launch of *The Diversity Escalator*, acknowledging the need for more diversity in the creative teams that produce content.⁹ *The Diversity Talent Escalator* is a 'new national initiative focused on increasing the representation of Australia's diverse communities within the television production sector'.¹⁰ The scheme's aim is to encourage and create clear pathways for emerging practitioners and freelancers from different backgrounds.

Dai Le from the Diverse Australasian Women's Network (DAWN) has reflected on the need to encourage young CALD Australians to seek a career in media, noting:

*We need to call on our young Australians and emerging talent from culturally diverse backgrounds to look at how they can play a role in this sector and other mainstream institutions. Living in the culturally rich nation that we have where more than a quarter of the population has a non-Anglo background, we must encourage more culturally diverse people to be part of the mainstream conversation, such as in the media, to truly reflect and portray the society we live in.*¹¹

Le created DAWN in order to develop culturally diverse leadership among young CALD Australians, and FECCA encourages other businesses in the media to follow suit with projects such as the Diversity Escalator and development of diverse leadership.

⁶ Ebeid, Michael, We still have a long way to go, *Australian Mosaic*, issue 44, FECCA 2016, p:6-7

⁷ Ebeid, Michael, We still have a long way to go, in *Australian Mosaic*, issue 44, FECCA 2016, p:7

⁸ Ebeid, Michael, We still have a long way to go, in *Australian Mosaic*, issue 44, FECCA 2016, p:7

⁹ See <http://www.sbs.com.au/aboutus/news-media-releases/view/id/1397/h/SBS-partners-with-national-screen-agencies-to-champion-off-screen-diversity>

¹⁰ See <http://www.sbs.com.au/aboutus/news-media-releases/view/id/1397/h/SBS-partners-with-national-screen-agencies-to-champion-off-screen-diversity>

¹¹ Le, Dai, #DIVERSITYMEDIA: Is social media the solution, *Australian Mosaic*, issue 44, FECCA 2016, p: 24

The notion of a need for increased diversity on and off screen has been echoed by Michelle Guthrie from the ABC:

*A public broadcaster like the ABC must reflect the society around it if it wants to remain relevant to its audience. In a world of choice, no media operation can afford to rely on its past achievements and reputation. This means seeking out every possible member of that audience and not just the traditional demographics the ABC likes to claim as its own. The ABC is funded by Australian taxpayers and must offer every taxpayer something in return.*¹²

Guthrie also noted how a practical solution to increase diversity can be to measure content for diversity 'across platforms and genres for benchmark data.'¹³ This can lead to identification of areas and where actions are needed to achieve a greater representation of the broad diversity of Australian audiences.¹⁴

More diverse on-screen and behind camera participation encourages diverse talent to see the industry as a viable career path, ensuring the most talented creative and technical people stay and strengthen the industry's human resources, resulting in film and television produced at the highest standards. Executive Director at PricewaterhouseCoopers (PwC), Megan Brownlow, encourages diversity in the workplace to optimise results: '[I]n creative or intellectual tasks, study after study has shown that more alternatives arise from a greater number of perspectives. While you might take longer to get to a decision it will be ultimately a better one. This is surely the goal of most media and marketing organisations – greater creativity, more intellectual firepower, better decisions, and less groupthink'.¹⁵

Increased diversity on screens and behind the scenes is possible through creating better links with the communities in Australia. FECCA urges the Australian film and television industry to make use of the skills and resources already represented in the community in the fields of science, technology, engineering, education, mathematics and the arts. Additionally, through targeted initiatives making connections with Australia's multicultural communities, the film and television industry can move beyond its current limitations towards a rich and nuanced reflection of modern Australia.

Diversity behind and on screen will lead to growth and sustainability in the industry due to more of the community identifying it as a place they can themselves be catered for and represented. This is increasingly important in a time where online choices are growing and access to country of origin media is becoming easier.

Media as a conduit for a social cohesive Australia

Increased diversity encourages social cohesion through identity building and a feeling of belonging among CALD communities. For new and emerging communities this is especially important in a time where negative stories or stories of 'the other' tend to be more visible in the media than the everyday normalisation of characters and their stories as true Australian stories.¹⁶ Examples can be drawn from progress made in Indigenous representation, with

¹² Guthrie, Michelle, A public broadcaster for all Australians, *Australian Mosaic*, issue 44, FECCA 2016, p: 11

¹³ Guthrie, Michelle, A public broadcaster for all Australians, *Australian Mosaic*, issue 44, FECCA 2016, p: 13

¹⁴ Guthrie, Michelle, A public broadcaster for all Australians, *Australian Mosaic*, issue 44, FECCA 2016

¹⁵ Brownlow, Megan, How Australian media could find growth through diversity, *Australian Mosaic*, issue 44, FECCA 2016, p: 14

¹⁶ Vatsikopoulos, Helen, Cultural diversity and the media, *Australian Mosaic*, Issue 44, FECCA 2016

five per cent of main characters on SBA are Indigenous.¹⁷ Research has demonstrated how 'Indigenous Australians are well represented onscreen compared to their proportion of the population'.¹⁸ Further, the launch of NITV as free-to-air television 'has been instrumental to the continued growth of Indigenous production sector and the sharing of stories created by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people'.¹⁹ Penny Smallacombe, Head of Indigenous at Screen Australia notes "You cannot underestimate how powerful it is for Indigenous people to turn on the TV and see a face that looks like their own"²⁰. The same is true for CALD Australians.

The corollary of this is that when Australians see culturally diverse representations of themselves on screens they are likely to identify and understand themselves as defined by their ethno-cultural breadth, rather than relating to CALD persons as something 'other'. As noted by Pino Migliorino, 'Unless we start reflecting our diversity, we will not create an inclusive society'.²¹ The industry must understand how identification with what is on screen is part of developing shared values, trust and a sense of belonging. FECCA's Chairperson, Joseph Caputo OAM JP, echoes this sentiment noting how media can play a vital role in promoting positive messages regarding Australia's cultural, linguistic, intersectional, and gender diversity, as well as the need for continued development of a strong resilient, cohesive and inclusive Australia.²²

*...a strong, independent media can play a crucial role in a robust democracy.
Media organisations have an obligation to be socially responsible.*

The more inclusive and diverse stories Australian film and television tells, the more they will appeal to a broader audience. A direct result of this is bigger audiences and larger box offices and distribution returns.

Further, as contributors through revenue to Screen Australia, CALD Australians have a legitimate expectation that their experiences will be represented through the projects Screen Australia funds.

International Co-Production as Economic and Social Investment

Australia currently has agreements with 12 countries allowing for the co-production of content. Whilst this development is welcomed FECCA submits that more could be done to enhance the benefits of these agreements and that the number of agreements could be increased.

A notable absence from the list of countries with which Australia has co-production agreements is India. India's several film industries are the world's most prolific, together generating around 3 billion US dollars per year, a figure expected to increase by around 11.5% over the next 3-4 years.²³ Beneficially, the production costs of Indian films are around

¹⁷ Ebeid, Michael, 'We still have a long way to go', *Australian Mosaic*, issue 44, FECCA 2016

¹⁸ *Seeing ourselves: Reflections on diversity in TV drama 2016*, p.3

¹⁹ Ebeid, Michael, 'We still have a long way to go', *Australian Mosaic*, issue 44, FECCA 2016, p: 7

²⁰ SBS News Media Release 'Milestone Study of Diversity on Television Released' 24 August 2016

<https://www.screenaustralia.gov.au/sa/newsroom/news/2016/mr-160824-study-of-diversity-on-tv-released>

²¹ *Seeing ourselves: Reflections on diversity in TV drama 2016*, p.24

²² Caputo, Joseph, *Australian Mosaic*, issue 44, FECA 2016, p: 5

²³ Ghosh, P. 'Bollywood at 100: How Big Is India's Mammoth Film Industry' *International Business Times* 5 March 13 <http://www.ibtimes.com/bollywood-100-how-big-indias-mammoth-film-industry-1236299>.

\$1.5 million per production on average, versus \$47.7 million for Hollywood films. Marketing costs are also significantly lower.²⁴

In addition to India there are a number of other national industries with whom Australian filmmakers could potentially partner. For example the Nigerian²⁵ and Hong Kong²⁶ film industries generate enormous revenue, into the billions every year. Australia, through its competent entity, Screen Australia, should be seeking to forge new partnerships with national cinema industries well beyond the existing twelve.

Further, Australia should be looking to increase the number of productions resulting from the existing partnerships. In some cases the agreements appear to have resulted in very few works. In some cases no work has been produced as a result of the agreements. It is the view of FECCA that pursuing more aggressively these avenues of co-production will both enhance the economic sustainability of the Australian film industry and increase cultural diversity in Australian productions. Prioritising applications which include an international co-production element would assist in this regard.

FECCA acknowledges that Screen Australia, as primarily a provider of funding, has to date played little role in facilitating co-productions beyond financing. However, FECCA is of the view that Screen Australia is positioned to take a more active role in fostering the relationships from which such productions are created. FECCA submits that Australia is uniquely placed to pursue the goal of co-production due to the nature of its workforce. Over the course of its history the Australian film industry has produced a disproportionately high volume of internationally successful participants, including actors, directors, writers, costume designers, composers, animators and cinematographers. Further, the ethno-cultural diversity of Australia's creative workforce means that there is an enormous resource with the cultural capacity to operate in conjunction with foreign film industries and produce content for foreign markets. Screen Australia should explore methods by which it can assist in helping to build co-productive relationships.

The Screen Australia²⁷ report notes that Australia's diverse pool of talented creatives are seeking work outside Australia. Harnessing this resource to work on international co-productions will not only ensure the economic sustainability of the industry but will also enhance the quality of productions by providing incentives for Australia's creative talent to create content locally.

Conclusion

Australia's population should be reflected in the cultural content it produces, particularly when funded by public initiatives. FECCA has established that on-and off-screen cultural diversity is a social imperative because of the power it has to enhance racial harmony.

FECCA asserts that recognising the value of Australia's ethno-cultural diversity not only serves the social goal of cohesion and harmony but can provide economic benefits central to the sustainability of the Australian Film and Television Industry. Screen Australia should explore its capacity to contribute to this through its international partnerships.

²⁴ Ibid.

²⁵ Bright, J. 'Meet 'Nollywood': The second largest movie industry in the world' *Fortune Magazine* 24 June 2015 <http://fortune.com/2015/06/24/nollywood-movie-industry/>

²⁶ Frater, P. 'Hong Kong Film Economy Worth \$2 Billion, But Could Do Better' *Variety* 25 March 2015 <http://variety.com/2015/biz/asia/hong-kong-film-economy-worth-2-billion-but-could-do-better-1201459623/>

²⁷ Seeing ourselves: Reflections on diversity in TV drama, Screen Australia 2016

FECCA thanks the committee for the opportunity to make this submission and would welcome the opportunity to be further involved in the process. For further comment please contact us at (02) 6282 5755 or to speak with our director please email emma@fecca.org.au