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AUSTRALIAN CHILDREN'S TELEVISION FOUNDATION

**RESPONSE TO THE PRODUCTIVITY COMMISSION'S
DRAFT REPORT ON BROADCASTING**

November 1999



INTRODUCTION:

The Productivity Commission's Draft Report on Broadcasting identifies an important feature of Australian broadcasting policy to date, which is the dominance of trade offs and policy *quid pro quos*, with regulatory arrangements in some areas compensating broadcasters for meeting policy objectives in other areas. The Commission describes the history of Australian broadcasting policy as one reflecting "past constraints and compromises."

In this submission, the Foundation confines its response to Chapter 9 of the Productivity Commission's draft report, dealing with content regulation, consumers and competition.

We commend the Commission's recognition of the vital social and cultural objectives of the regulation for local content and children's programs. The social and cultural objectives of government regulation should not be seen as tradeable objectives, which may be compromised in the exercise of other policy objectives. They represent fundamental values which the Parliament and community have endorsed and require in and of themselves. They should therefore be treated quite separately from mechanisms designed to foster competition and efficiency.

The Foundation endorses the Commission's recommendation that the effectiveness of the regulations for local content and children's programs should be regularly reviewed against the social and cultural objectives of the content requirements. We consider that these regulations will become more, not less, important in the future, when the consumer will be offered a far greater choice of services. In the future "the media" will become even more ubiquitous and good policy even more important. Regulation will need to adapt, but it should not be dismantled.

A. RESPONSE TO SPECIFIC DRAFT RECOMMENDATIONS:

9.1. That the existing quotas for Australian first release drama and documentaries should be maintained

The Foundation endorses the recommendation that the sub-quotas for new drama and documentary programming should be maintained.

The targeting of the 'creative elements test for Australian programs should be improved by removing criteria that require non-creative cast, crew, and production processes to be Australian

The Foundation agrees with the Commission that the 'creative elements' test for Australian programs could be better targeted. However, we do not agree that dismantling the current requirement would improve its effectiveness – it needs to be augmented, rather than pared back.

The Foundation has concerns with the manner in which the Standard defines "Australian program", without any reference to the Australian themes or perspectives which would arise out of the program's concept originating in Australia.

Such an additional requirement is fundamental to the social and cultural objectives of the regulation itself.

So, the Foundation would propose that, in addition to the current requirements regarding the personnel involved in the production of a program, there should also be consideration of the 'origination' of the program's idea. If the cultural underpinning of the regulation is the encouragement of programming which fosters a sense of cultural identity for Australians, then it is fundamental that the regulation should be geared towards content which has been originated by Australians. Australian writers can be given basic storylines about the adventures of an animated green dinosaur, a hero of German fairytale folklore, but their creative scripting efforts alone will not make this program one which encourages a sense of Australian cultural identity.

9.2 That the existing quotas for children's programs on commercial television should be maintained, but the requirement that all of the P program sub-quota must be filled with Australian programs should be reconsidered

The Foundation endorses the maintenance of existing quotas for children's programs on commercial television.

The Foundation would, however, strongly oppose any removal of the current requirement that all of the "P" quota programs be Australian.

The suggestion for re-consideration of this aspect of the children's program regulations is motivated by a concern that 'Australianness' does not necessarily ensure quality, and that by lifting this 'Australianness' requirement, the quality and diversity of programming for pre-school children might be improved.

The P quota amounts to 2.5 hours for each broadcaster per week (half an hour, each week day.) This is a tiny obligation in respect of young viewers. It is highly unlikely that if it was possible to include non-Australian programming within the P quota, that the commercial broadcasters would make any effort to search the world for the best, most stimulating selection of programs made for pre-school children. This is certainly not what had occurred prior to 1996, when the requirement that all "P" quota programs had to be Australian was first introduced.

The worldwide trend in pre-school programming is to treat very young children as potential consumers of licensed spin-off products. Internationally, pre-school programs produced for export are now almost exclusively devised as part of a marketing package. The success of merchandised product is dependent on a regular (preferably daily) on-screen presence. Pre-school programs are therefore being produced in blocks of 260 episodes (to encourage daily screenings) and offered to broadcasters at nominal licence fees. The host broadcaster is also usually offered a percentage of merchandising returns in that country to encourage a regular on-screen presence of that program.

The most likely result of lifting the Australian requirement from the P quota would be that each of the commercial broadcasters would end up filling the quota with one long running imported program which it considered had significant commercial potential. This would cost the broadcasters very little indeed, and would, potentially, earn them significant revenue. It is hardly an outcome that is in the particular interests of young viewers or consistent with the objectives of the regulation.

When there is sufficient commercial incentive, the commercial broadcasters have been prepared to screen international pre-school programs. For example, the Nine Network screened the *Barney* program after it made millions of dollars in merchandising revenue for PBS in the United States. An Australian licensing industry magazine recently carried the announcement that the Nine Network will shortly screen Nickelodeon's *Blues Clues* as part of the Australian licensing campaign for that program.

The social and cultural objective of the regulation should be to balance these types of commercial and merchandise driven programs with a locally produced program, which is made specifically to enhance the experiences of Australian children. Pre-schoolers are at a particularly impressionable age, and they are developing language and social skills, which will form the basis of their success in future life. They deserve to have quality programming, which is also culturally relevant, made specifically for them.

The Foundation could not argue, however, that all past and current Australian P programs are shining examples of quality and diversity in television programs for pre-schoolers. These programs are frequently made on very low budgets and utilise over-worked and tired concepts. This does not automatically mean that the regulations are at fault. It does, however, support the Commission's recommendation that the regulations should be regularly reviewed to ensure that they are meeting the social and cultural objects that they are intended to meet. These reviews should include reviews of the programs that are classified and the classification process itself.

That the role of national broadcasters and subscription broadcasters in providing children's programs which meet government social and cultural objectives should be further examined in the context of future digital and convergent technologies.

The Foundation would not accept any suggestion that the social and cultural role of the national broadcasters should relieve the commercial broadcasters of their own responsibilities in this regard.

The national broadcasters provide a different broadcasting service, under their own charters. They complement the service provided by the commercial broadcasters, but to place local content requirement responsibilities or responsibilities for children's programs solely on the national broadcasters would lead to a loss of diversity, and reduced access for the audience.

The majority of the Australian population watches the commercial broadcasters. The ABC's audience share is believed to be 15%, and the SBS's audience share is far less again. The audience share of the public broadcasters is not likely to increase in the future. Indeed, international experience from the United Kingdom and elsewhere has been that as

the choices within the commercial sector (across all forms of broadcasting) increase, the audience share of public broadcasters is eroded further. It would therefore be entirely inappropriate to confer all responsibility for cultural and social objectives on the national broadcasters. These objectives would become marginalised and their form of expression limited.

Similarly, the role of subscription services in supplying programming should not remove the obligations from the commercial free to air broadcasters to meet cultural and social objectives. Those objectives are enshrined in legislation for the benefit of all Australians, not just those that subscribe to additional services.

9.3 *That the Australian content regulations for commercial television should be simplified and better targeted to their social and cultural objectives by removing the overall quota for Australian content of 55 per cent, and the Australian production quota of 80 per cent for advertising.*

The Foundation does not support this recommendation.

The Draft Report correctly identifies that the rationale of the regulation for Australian content and children's programming is the promotion of social and cultural objectives. This regulation is not designed to be an industry assistance measure. However, in order to ensure that the audience has ready access to programs that reflect and foster a diverse cultural identity, there must be a dynamic and viable production industry to produce these programs. A 'critical mass' must be maintained on the supply side, to ensure that these minimum levels of highly valued programs are produced.

Such a critical mass could not be maintained by the demand for the sub-quota programming alone. The production of 130 hours of new Australian "C" programs per year per commercial network (which includes 32 hours of new Australian children's drama) and 20 hours of Australian documentaries could not sustain a viable production industry that is responsive to audience needs.

Any confidence that this programming will be shown without the overall transmission requirement being maintained is not well-founded. Some commercial networks currently only just meet these requirements.

For this reason, it is critical that the overall transmission quota for Australian content, and the quota for Australian advertisements, be maintained. The demand for this programming, which is fostered by the respective quotas, goes some way to ensuring that a critical mass is maintained in the industry. These regulations therefore act as important cross subsidies.

9.4 *That for the Australian and children's content quotas which remain in place, the ABA should conduct regular and public evaluations against the social and cultural objectives of the content requirements*

The Foundation endorses this recommendation.

The Foundation has long been a vocal supporter of the children's programming requirements because of their social and cultural importance for Australian children.

This importance means that they must be administered so that they continue to achieve their cultural objectives. Programming which is not truly "Australian", notwithstanding that it meets the current technical criteria of an "Australian program", should not be able to qualify for the quota.

The Foundation notes the Report on the Film and Television Production Industry produced by the AFC and FFC at the request of the Minister for the Arts and Centenary of Federation in November 1999. That report highlights a recent upswing in Australia of international co-produced television drama, which is originated overseas (primarily for the US cable market) and which does not meet the Government's cultural objectives. Nevertheless, these programs (which include the production of *The Lost World*, *Beastmaster* and *Farscape*) qualify as Australian content under the current Australian content standard.

Attached to this report is an article that appeared in the North American television industry magazine *KidScreen*, about the development of the *Farscape* program. It is very clear from the article that this particular program employed Australians, but was in all other respects an American production. While this program has not yet been screened, and has therefore not yet been classified by the ABA, it would clearly meet the criteria for Australian content, using the creative elements test. If however there was also a requirement that the program was 'originated' by an Australian, this would more effectively target the social and cultural objectives of the regulation – that Australian audiences have access to Australian stories which foster an Australian cultural identity. And a program like *Farscape* would not qualify as Australian content.

This issue is also relevant to the implementation of the Children's Drama Quota. A review of the programs that have received C Drama classification in recent years reveals that a number of animated productions, based on European fairytales, have received C Drama classification. These include *Tabaluga*, an animated version of a German fairytale about a green dragon, which lives in Greenland.

Programs of this nature completely undermine the rationale for the regulation. The Foundation therefore supports the proposition that the ABA should undertake a systematic and public evaluation of the extent to which the administration of the quotas is achieving their social and cultural objectives.

B. OTHER ISSUES:

Pay Television

While the current local content expenditure requirement imposed by the BSA on pay television operators is currently unenforceable because of the technical framing of the legislative provision, the ABA has issued guidelines for pay television operators, which aim to encourage them to meet the minimum expenditure levels. ABA compliance figures show, however, that these minimum levels are not being achieved.

The Commission recognises that the minimum expenditure requirement on Australian drama which applies to the pay television operators (and by implication, subsidy mechanisms in general) will not of themselves ensure that the subsequently produced content is actually screened for the audience. This highlights the need for a regulatory approach which requires minimum levels of programs to be broadcast, rather than simply funded.

However, the weakness in the current formulation does not of itself lead to the conclusion that Australian programming or other content regulation should not apply to pay tv. The rationale for requiring minimum levels of local drama programming on pay tv drama channels is drawn from the same cultural arguments which operate in the free-to-air context. It is the rights of the audience to a diversity of socially and culturally relevant programming which matters. The formulation of the expenditure requirement for pay television simply recognises that those operators are operating in a different market and have a different approach to scheduling than the commercial broadcasters, and that a transmission-based requirement would not be appropriate.

The Foundation strongly supports the maintenance of the expenditure requirement for pay television, and recommends improving the operation of this aspect of the regulation by adding a requirement that the programs on which that expenditure is made must be broadcast, within a certain period of time.

Tradeable quotas

The Foundation opposes the notion that quota obligations could be traded between broadcasters or channels.

Such a practice would almost certainly result in a reduction in the quantity of local programming currently shown, as broadcasters would trade off their obligations for certain programming with another broadcaster or channel which, due to that broadcaster's or channel's scheduling choices or priorities, shows more of that particular type of programming. The Commission itself recognises that this is the potential danger of adopting this practice.

This would also lead to a reduction in the diversity of program delivery of a particular service, with the consequent reduction in access for the audience to that type of program.

The effects of subsidies to Australian programs

The well-documented experience of New Zealand demonstrates the weakness of a subsidy-only model, which the Commission itself has recognised. Subsidy alone does not ensure a broadcast market for the programs which have been made, particularly when the broadcasters themselves do not have to contribute to the production budgets.

Instead, subsidy must go hand in hand with transmission or expenditure requirements for broadcasters, in order to ensure that a diversity of high quality programming is actually broadcast or otherwise accessible to the audience.

Regulation for children's programs

The Commission incorrectly states that the ABA's requirement of a minimum licence fee of \$45,000 per half hour applies to all first release Australian children's programs (at page 213). In fact, this minimum licence fee applies only to the 32 hours of first release Australian children's drama. Broadcasters can, and do, pay much less than this per half hour for new "C" and "P" programming.

The Draft Report also misconstrues comments made by the Foundation that "...there is a dearth of quality children's programs available internationally..." (at page 203). The Foundation was referring to live action children's drama, which is in short supply worldwide (this is in contrast to animation, plenty of which is made for the family and adult market, and is largely from the United States). The reason that few countries produce live action children's drama is that few countries specifically regulate in favour of children's drama. Whilst broadcasters in many countries will not pay the licence fees or production costs involved in screening locally produced children's drama, they will acquire Australian children's drama because they are able to acquire it at very low cost. This is why there is a ready international market for quality children's drama. This international market alone would not, however, be sufficient to fund the production of Australian children's drama. So the suggestion that because there is an international market for Australian children's drama, regulation to ensure the production of this material may, in future, be unnecessary, cannot be sustained.

The "cost" of local content quotas

While the Commission believes that "ultimately the whole community bears the cost of both subsidies and quotas", there is no exposition of what the cost of these quotas is believed to be, in light of their accepted success and value to the community. In this light, the Foundation finds it surprising that the Commission would simply assume there is a cost, without attempting to quantify or qualify its position. Clearly, subsidies are provided from taxes. However, the notion of the "cost" of a requirement that the commercial networks show very minimal levels of Australian and children's programming is far harder to identify, and should not just be assumed, without also recognising the overwhelming benefit which also accrues.

Australian first release requirements

The Commission has stated that the first release requirements for drama, documentary and children's sub-quotas "are an industry assistance mechanism. They provide a guaranteed local market for a minimum of quality new programs each year." (at page 227). However, this first release requirement is actually a mechanism to ensure that the audience continues to have access to a diversity of programming, rather than be subjected to endless repeats. As such, it is a vital aspect of the programming regulation. It is simply a corollary of this primary function that there will also be increased activity in the production sector.

The future – content regulation in the digital age

"The liberty of expression should not be subordinated to the logic of economics".

Luis Tarsitano

President

International Association of Latin American Broadcasters

At the United Nations World Forum on Television, 1999

The Commission has asked the industry to consider the likely relevance of content regulation in the future. The Commission envisages a future that offers consumers and producers of broadcasting services enormous opportunities, through the provision of many new services.

The communications revolution is well under way in most parts of the world, where subscription television services have been operating for a considerable period of time. The Foundation believes that international experiences can provide a very good indication of what the future may hold for Australia.

In virtually every part of the world, the 1990s witnessed an explosion of increased services in electronic media, as the following examples demonstrate.

- The Caribbean Islands are home to a population of 6 million people in 15 countries. The number of television stations in that small part of the world has increased from 19 to 43 in the last decade.
- In Turkey there were no private free to air broadcasters prior to 1990. Now there are 16 (and hundreds of pay television channels are available).
- Public free to air broadcasters dominated the broadcasting landscape in almost every European country (excluding the United Kingdom) prior to 1990. In many European countries commercial broadcasting did not exist. Now there are around one hundred commercial free to air broadcasters in Europe and many more pay television channels.
- Pay television has become increasingly competitive in the United Kingdom in the last five years, taking significant audience share from the free to air broadcasters. At the beginning of the decade there was one pay television children's channel. That channel has now folded, but there are at least five pay television channels exclusively for children in the United Kingdom now, and a number of others in the process of being established.

Whilst it sounds logical that the increased competition generated by the proliferation of new channels would lead to increased opportunities for production, a diversity of programming and increased prices for content, this has simply not occurred. Indeed, the international trends of the decade in respect of programming have been as follows.

- Licence fees for programs worldwide have remained static or have, in fact, decreased.
- Individual markets have fragmented. At the same time that it has become possible to make more than one sale of a program into a territory, the prices paid for that program have decreased accordingly.
- New services starting up have not had budgets for the acquisition of new programs. They acquire libraries of old and repeat material, and pay nominal licence fees for this product.

- A worldwide trend towards vertical integration has transformed those companies that were the world "majors" in entertainment product at the beginning of the decade into "mega" companies, which control broadcasting, production and distribution functions across the globe. The majority of new services have turned out to be delivery platforms for American content.

The increased strengthening of local content regulation around the world, which the Commission quotes News Limited as identifying in the public hearings, is a direct response to these trends. The communications revolution has not increased the diversity of program options available. It has led to the recycling of the same material, and the more efficient and thorough distribution of the same material. Traffic on the "super highway" has flowed in one direction only.

The United Nations held a World Television Forum in November 1999, in which many delegates identified the privatisation of broadcasting services in their countries, and the increasing globalisation of services, as an "electronic curtain" which had descended on the world.

There is no question that a technological revolution is under way. But this revolution does not diminish the important role that the media plays in any well informed democracy. The media will remain our major source of information about local, national and international affairs. It will remain a major source of entertainment and education. It is therefore imperative that a technology neutral approach to policy regulation is adopted. Rather than concentrating on the technology, policy should be clearly focussed on objectives. The absolute legitimacy of policy objectives concerned with social and cultural outcomes should be recognised. These objectives should not be the subject of trade-offs in any context, and the freedom of all nations to develop these objectives should also be recognised.

We attach the AITED (Association of International Educational and Discovery Channels) Manifesto, 1999/2000, for the information of the Commission.

MIP-TV

SPECIAL REPORT

ATTACHMENT 1

Henson, Hallmark and Nine Network embroiled in ambitious co-production with *Farscape*

KidScreen chronicles the development of this sci-fi series from idea to air date and speaks with the creators who've influenced the project along the way

F*arscape*, a co-production by the Jim Henson Company in the U.S., Hallmark Entertainment in the U.S. and Nine Films and Television, part of Nine Network in Australia, blends state-of-the-art animatronics from the Jim Henson Creature Shop, CGI and live action to create a sci-fi universe on location in Australia. And for anyone who remembers back to 1978, let me assure you it ain't "Pigs in Space."

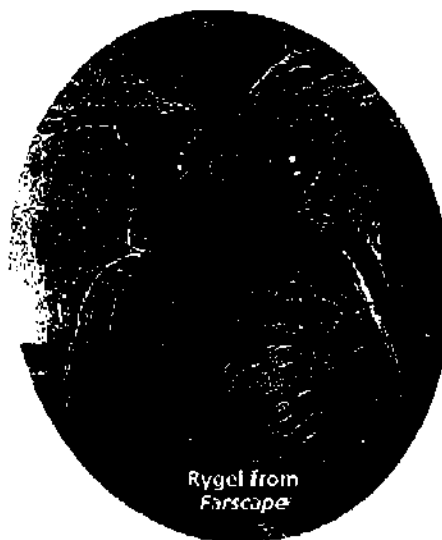
The 22 x one-hour project—dubbed by the Jim Henson Company as its "most ambitious production ever"—begins in 1991, when Brian Henson, president of the Jim Henson Company, and his team of developers toss around ideas for a sci-fi show.

Set apart from other sci-fi shows with its present-day setting, *Farscape* opens with a 20th century astronaut getting caught in a wormhole and flung across the universe, arriving without invitation into the middle of an alien conflict. The hero, John Crichton, played by *Party of Five*'s Ben Browder, lands on a living animatronic ship named Moya, joining a motley band of rebel alien refugees—a creative combo of prosthetics and animatronics—in their bawle against the Peacekeepers.

Marcie Ross, VP of the TV group at Henson and creative exec on *Farscape* from its inception, explains: "Brian [Henson]'s dream was to do a show that utilized all the talents of the Creature Shop in London—the wonderful designers and puppeteers and our licensing and merchandising and publishing division. The 'uber' picture for the whole project was to link all elements of the [Jim Henson] Company." At the same time, exec producer and series creator Rockne O'Bannon, the former exec producer and writer of the *SeaQuest* DSV series and screenwriter of the feature film *Alien Nation*, signs on as collaborator.

Don't even try to spot the Muppet. *Farscape* marks a departure for the Jim Henson Company from strictly family fare by aiming for an older prime-time audience. "Family tends to be a bad word in TV," says Ross, explaining that family programming tends to connote programming without an edge.

"I think the whole Henson mentality is to always have humor and to play the story on lots of different levels, everything from the Muppet humor to a show like *Farscape*," Ross adds. "I think younger audiences are going to appreciate it because it's this cool spectacle with strange animatronics and creatures and technology, and the adults are going to be drawn to it through some pretty sophisticated storytelling."



Rygel from *Farscape*

Duncan Kenworthy, then-GM of Jim Henson Productions (which was renamed the Jim Henson Company last year), pitches *Farscape* in 1992 to Fox in the U.S., which passes. Angus Fletcher, senior VP of International co-production, development and TV distribution at the Jim Henson Company, reflects on the network's reluctance: "This really was a show on such a scale—with animatronic-heavy characters. You can't pilot such a show—you need to do a certain number of episodes before the [budget] numbers begin to make sense. That was primarily the problem with Fox, and indeed with many broadcasters. To launch a significant number of episodes cold is a brave decision on everyone's part." But, he cautions, "if you start looking around saying, 'there's too much or too little, too this, too that,' you

run into the danger of not being able to make anything because you can always find a reason to not make something."

Fletcher's arrival at Henson in 1992 begins the next stage of the *Farscape* story as he starts to mastermind the co-production deal.

Although Fletcher asserts, with tongue in cheek, "we have no enemies, just friends," he is less than forthcoming with budget figures. "In any event," he adds, "we don't talk about figures of the total budget, and even then, we lie." Fletcher estimates the budget at more than US\$2 million per episode, comprised of deficit financing from Henson and Hallmark, with undisclosed license fees from USA Networks' Sci Fi Channel and from Australia's Nine Network. Henson holds all licensing and merchandising rights. Hallmark and Henson share U.S. domestic distribution rights, and Henson holds all international distribution rights outside of Australia. Also reluctant to give figures for the series, Bonnie Hammer, senior VP of Sci Fi Channel programming and USA Networks original production, says that *Farscape* is "the most expensive drama made for basic cable."

And aside from a share of deficit financing, why did Henson choose to partner with Hallmark? "We're working with Hallmark [because] we have an extremely close relationship with them on many fronts, not least of which is our [Odyssey Channel] venture and the Kermit Channel venture, but more importantly for this, we have a significant production history," says Fletcher. "We produced *Gulliver's Travels*, which [Hallmark] deficit financed and is distributing. And we've made a lot of characters for many of their event programs, from *The Odyssey* through to *Merlin*." Hallmark officially signs on in early 1998.

And the reason for the Australian partnership? "To get as far away from my front doorstep as possible," jokes Fletcher. "No, that's not true." Having co-produced the mini-series *Frankie's House* with ITV in the U.K. and the Australian Broadcasting Corporation in 1990, Fletcher suggests taking the show to Australia, and "it made sense to have a significant

Farscape continued on page 13

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MIP-TV SPECIAL REPORT

Farscape continued from page 94

partner. [Nine Network] tends to work on bigger, more high-profile projects. They've carried some of the Hallmark product."

In addition to the prior relationship, Fletcher concedes that "the real reason for going down there is creative—the look [Australia] could bring to the show. You can go from desert to jungle to mountain, and you haven't really gone very far from Sydney." Henson's Marcie Ross continues: "Creatively, Australia was exactly what we wanted it to be. At first, we were talking about filming in England, because that's where our Creature Shop is, but most sci-fi shows are very much set-bound, and we wanted to be able to go out onto different planets. Australia has the perfect diverse landscape—it looks sort of alien."

The project also picks up Australian writers to join the U.S. team of scribes that includes O'Bannon, co-exec producer David Kemper, the former creator and writer on the TV series *Pacific Blue*, and writer Richard Manning. All directors, with the exception of Brian Henson, are Australian. And so *Farscape* becomes an Australian content show, with an Aussie majority of cast and crew.

In January 1996, Pete Coogan, exec in charge of production for the Jim Henson Company, flies from the U.K. to Australia to base the production out of the Fox Studios in Sydney and to check out locations. He moves to Australia in June 1998.

Are there any currency gains from shooting in Australia? "Coming into the show, there was a sense of how to get more bang for your buck, as it were," says Coogan. "At the time, the exchange rate for the Australian dollar was very, very weak against the greenback. But now, the Australian dollar has become very strong again. But you have to take a rate and lock your rate and then forget about it frankly, because otherwise you become very, very depressed or very, very happy."

Coogan describes the advantages of shooting *Down Under* in achieving feature-quality production values: "In L.A., we wouldn't get a [feature] film crew, but [in Australia], there's no line of demarcation between film and TV, so probably 70% of our crew have extensive experience in Australian movies. Because of that, the expectations are higher, and we definitely are challenged in using animatronics, CGI [at Sydney's Carner McClellan Design], live action [and] prosthetics. [We're] trying to do everything on a TV schedule that is extremely challenging in any country."

What kind of sked allows the Australian crew to get it in the can? "On episode 10, we're onto an eight-day schedule and, if possible, [want] to get it under eight days. But the premiere episode [block shot with third episode], we shot for 21 days." Shooting began September 1998, and is expected to wrap July 1999.

Does Coogan have any concerns about working in Australia? "I had this perception of Australia being extremely hot all year round, and [thought] if you put people in a prosthetic, it will just melt." To date, everyone has kept their cool.

A sneak preview of *Farscape* aired on USA Network on March 14, and its premiere episode kicked off on the Sci Fi Channel in the U.S. on March 19 as part of the channel's Friday night block of original programming called Sci Fi Prime. The launch is part of Sci Fi 2.0, the Sci Fi Channel's initiative to create a broader audience for the channel through an expanded lineup of original prime-time programming. *Farscape* will premiere on Nine Network at the end of 1999 or in early 2000.

Sci Fi Channel's Hammer explains *Farscape*'s appeal for the channel, which picked up the first 13 episodes in May 1998 and the remaining nine in January 1999: "It [was] the broadness and scope of the project that intrigued us. Because it's new, the CGI and animatronics are very, very big. It's not like buying acquired product that has old-style animation or old-style animatronics or creatures. We want to expand the definition of sci-fi—'outside of that which we know to be true' is really the definition now. It's not the older definition of science fiction, where it's just otherworldly stuff."

With U.S. and Australian territories presold, interest from the international market has been strong.

Collectible figures aimed at the adult consumer will be launched at the end of 1999, with toy products for the younger audience in the following year.

Stretching budgets, schedules, wormholes, sci-fi programming and the definition of the Henson family audience in one fell swoop, *Farscape* will take us to a parallel universe and home again. So kick back and order up the alien pizza, it's coming to a TV near you.



Zen from *Farscape*

AITED

Association Internationale des Télévisions
d'Education et de Découverte
International Association of Educational and
Discovery Television Companies

Issy-les-Moulineaux, October 25, 1999

Mrs Patricia EDGAR
Chairman
THE AUSTRALIAN CHILDREN'S
TELEVISION FOUNDATION
145 Smith Street FITZROY
VIC 3065 Victoria

Dear Chairman,

As one of AITED's main tasks is to promote a knowledge channel, I am pleased to invite you to take part in the drafting and global circulation of the first educational television manifesto. The success of this manifesto requires a clearly-defined process.

As an initial step, I would be grateful if you could send me your comments and suggestions on the enclosed manifesto, which was written – at the Executive Committee's request – by Mr Jose Manuel Perez Tornero, Vice President of AITED, and Mr Salvador Ottobre, Representative Delegate of the Latin America Commission.

On November 15, 1999, I will send the final draft of the manifesto for your approval. I will be presenting it at the United Nations in New York on November 18. Just before the next MIP TV (April 2000), the manifesto will be officially presented to the Press at UNESCO in Paris by all 40 members of AITED and a number of international figures with an interest in promoting educational television. The year 2000 will be devoted to an exploration of the international broadcasting resources required to put the manifesto into effect and the selection of the most appropriate among them.

Before that I would be grateful if you could start collecting endorsements from figures concerned by the manifesto in your country and continent, and who are potential members of our educational television advisory committee. By personality, in this connection, I am thinking of leading figures from the following fields: culture (writers, philosophers, artists etc), education, science, politics, as well as institutions, associations and well-known universities and broadcasting companies.

Please do not hesitate to contact the representative delegates of the five regional commissions of AITED, who are responsible for collecting information in their regions and passing it on to the AITED Secretariat in Paris.

Thank you for your interest in the development of AITED. I look forward to hearing from you soon.

Yours faithfully,


Jérôme CLEMENT

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AITED

Association Internationale des Télévisions
d'Education et de Découverte
International Association of Educational and
Discovery Television Companies

INITIATIVE FOR EDUCATIONAL AND CULTURAL TELEVISION

AITED Manifesto, 1999/2000

Preamble

Television fills a large part of the everyday life of billions of people world-wide. Day-in, day-out, it has an extensive influence on our world view, our cultural models, and even the make-up of the social fabric. And this influence is being continuously reinforced by the ongoing process of globalization and technological progress. The entire planet seems to have become a single market with respect to television. There is increasing concentration in the broadcasting sector, while there are also signs of an increasing commercialization of television programming (and hence of culture), with all its attendant risks. Yet in this precise context, one fundamental observation is inescapable: Television, as a means of communication, is such an important medium for humanity that its development must not be allowed to depend exclusively on market forces or technological change. More than ever, therefore, it is necessary to take practical measures to enable television to play a truly active role in realizing the essential values of humanity.

It is precisely these circumstances that dictate the rationale and justification of television's educational and cultural vocation, and, consequently, so-called educational television. But this prerogative must be asserted. AITED, the International Association of Educational and Discovery Channels, which comprises most educational and cultural television companies, has accordingly decided to launch a debate to raise awareness about the need to promote the development of educational and cultural television worldwide in all its forms, given its critical importance for the advancement of humanity.

AITED is calling on all interested individuals, local authorities, organizations, companies and institutions to mobilize for this objective of developing educational and cultural television. AITED invites them to join in this consciousness-raising exercise by endorsing the present manifesto ("Initiative for Educational and Cultural Television"), as a prelude to the achievement of the decisive task of placing television in the service of education, culture and inter-personal exchanges.

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Manifesto

We the undersigned, aware of the strategic role that educational and cultural television can play in human development, wish to assert the following principles and values:

1. Television, which today represents the most powerful communication vehicle on earth, cannot allow itself to be an industry or a commodity subject to market forces alone. Nor must it be allowed to succumb to purely commercial pressures and globalization that sweeps away cultural values and identities. It is essential for television to work in favor of democratic citizenship based on a respect for human rights, equality of access to education, and the defense of cultural values and identities.
2. Television must therefore support and foster education by facilitating the acquisition of knowledge and contributing to the development both of the individual and the community by creating a framework conducive to the promotion of educational values.
3. television must serve as a vehicle for scientific knowledge and stimulate creation by making scientific discoveries accessible to all and by fostering the emergence of a critical approach to technological innovation.
4. Television must serve as a tool in the service of life-long learning. It must work in partnership with teaching and training professionals by adapting to its environment and to its audience, and strive to facilitate the professional and social insertion of individuals by continually updating their knowledge.
5. Television must serve the arts in terms of awareness and popularization. It must stimulate creativity and imagination in all areas by cooperating with individuals, communities, organizations and institutions of the artistic and cultural community.
6. Television must contribute to promoting democratic citizenship. It must be an educational tool in the service of respect for and exercise of human rights. It must foster political pluralism and active participation in civic life.
7. Television must promote the wealth of cultural diversity and beliefs in all their different expressions: lifestyles, customs, language and cultural heritage. Far from changing into an agent of cultural homogenization and mimetism, television must defend cultural particularisms in an environment of open debate and respect for individual rights.
8. Television must be a space where peoples, individuals and cultures can come together and share. It must therefore encourage peaceful relations between peoples, nations and states, supporting peace and social cohesion and striving to reduce inequalities and settle conflict.
9. Consequently, television has an obligation to strive for quality – a quality obligation in relation to the values it defends and the products that it broadcasts, combined with an obligation of truth. This duality goes hand-in-hand with credibility and can only be attained via autonomy, veracity and honesty.

Missions

To consolidate these principles and defend these values, it is necessary to initiate a positive development momentum for educational television where individuals, communities and institutions will receive new roles and new missions.

- A. The parliaments and legislatures of the various States and regions must lay a legal basis for an educational and cultural broadcasting service that is accessible to all, oversee its operation and development, guarantee its independence and suitability for the interests of citizens and its stability. Similarly, they must take the necessary measures to encourage private sector production and broadcasting initiatives in the area of educational programming.
- B. Governments and government agencies must finance or subsidize the implementation of an education and cultural television service. They must devote sufficient economic, human and technological resources to it to make it accessible to all and guarantee a high-quality service. It is equally their responsibility, via tax incentives, subsidies and other incentive schemes to promote private initiatives in the educational and cultural television fields.
- C. The broadcasting sector, and more especially public sector services, must ensure that their educational and cultural programs meet social requirements. Their role within the overall offer of television services must be clearly defined and acknowledged. They must also be provided with resources proportional to those devoted to television services as a whole and to the social importance of promoting educational and cultural values.
- D. The education authorities and those with links to training bodies must ensure that they effectively take part in educational and cultural television while at the same time contributing to its development. This is an objective that piecemeal initiatives will not on their own be sufficient to achieve. It is vital that in the field of educational and cultural television, a positive outlook with respect to the use of broadcasting media to support and broadcast artistic and scientific productions is created.
- E. International educational, cultural and scientific development and co-operation agencies must also pay particular attention to educational and cultural television. They must not only foster its development, but also, given its specific character, make it a privileged vehicle for cross-border initiatives and programming.
- F. Similarly, local and regional authorities must consider educational and cultural television as an appropriate instrument for safeguarding their cultural heritage and promoting its diversity in such a way as to reconcile multi-cultural realities and the lasting nature of local values. The concept of quality must thus be a central concern.
- G. Non-government organizations and civic institutions must work closely with the people involved in educational and cultural television so that such television services provide them, through their input and

requirements, a space where active participation and social pluralism is possible.

- H. The education system as a whole must promote media education, and more particularly televisual education, in order to develop audiences' critical faculties. Educational and cultural television will benefit from independently-minded viewers, as will the overall quality of television in general.
- I. For their part, industry and the scientific community must cooperate with educational and cultural television while making sure that technological innovation and creative techniques of information processing and broadcasting are placed in the service of education and culture in order to exploit the potential of the new media to the full.
- J. The people in educational and cultural television, including the public services, must be particularly careful to safeguard and broadcast the audio-visual cultural heritage while at the same time making access to it easier. It is also their responsibility, through the use of flexible packages, to foster its use for educational ends.

A collective commitment

To fulfill these missions, everybody must contribute. This is a commitment to educational and cultural values through the medium of television and an initiative in which all of us, individuals, communities and institutions alike, must actively take part. We must lobby governments and public authorities, industry, private sector companies and other bodies. We must stimulate participation and creativity. We must explore and experiment with new approaches, encourage international exchanges and co-operation. And we must strive to ensure that audiovisual training is securely in the service of education and culture by encouraging young people to contribute to educational and cultural television. This is a collective, plural commitment to promote the sustainable development, in social and cultural terms, of our television system, as well as the right to education and personal fulfillment.