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SPADA'S SUBMISSION TO THE PUBLIC MEDIA MINISTERIAL ADVISORY GROUP

The Screen Production and Development Association of New Zealand ('SPADA') welcomes the Government's support of public media, and appreciates this opportunity to engage with the Public Media Ministerial Advisory Group ('Advisory Group').

Established in 1982, SPADA is a membership based non-profit organisation that advocates on behalf of its members for a robust and sustainable New Zealand independent screen production industry operating in a contestable funding environment.

A robust and sustainable independent screen sector promotes:

- Cultural diversity and creativity
- New voices
- The growth of small and medium size enterprises
- Price contestability; and
- Diversity of supply by addressing potential negative effects associated with the integration of the broadcasting and production functions.

SPADA has responded to the Advisory Group's specific areas of interest below.

1.0 THE ROLE OF PUBLIC MEDIA IN NATIONAL IDENTITY AND AN INFORMED DEMOCRACY

- 1.1 In a small market like New Zealand, publicly-funded media ensures a range of New Zealand content that would not otherwise be available. Traditionally the genres and audiences that have been designated "at risk" within a purely commercial environment have been drama (including cinema), documentary, Māori, children and special interests.
- 1.2 As New Zealand content carriers have become increasingly commercially aggressive, to counter the threat from highly resourced international carriers (such as Netflix, Amazon, etc) whom have no interest in New Zealand content, and costs have been driven out of the business, in-depth information programming such as investigative journalism and other researched information programming have joined the endangered species list. Furthermore they have become subject to commercial capture promoting specific agendas rather than trusted and reliable sources of information for the body politic.

1.3 New arrangements are therefore needed to ensure that diverse New Zealand content including high quality journalism, is available for audiences across multiple platforms.

2.0 ARRANGEMENTS TO ENSURE SUSTAINABLE, LONG-TERM FUNDING FOR PUBLIC MEDIA

2.1 Background

Since the restructure of broadcasting in 1989, NZ On Air and RNZ have represented twin pillars of public media. SPADA believes each should have a clear mandate to ensure a range of diverse programming to meet the needs of New Zealand citizens both in terms of shared experiences and special interest programming.

2.2 Current Situation

Both NZ On Air and RNZ have been subjected to a funding freeze for the last 10 years. This has resulted in:

- Significant drop in the purchasing power of each agency
- Commercially-driven programming environment for television
- Loss of diversity in programming such as educational and children's programming, investigative journalism, current affairs, drama and documentary, arts and other special interest programming; and
- Erosion in capability and capacity in the independent production sector.

2.3 Principles for Change

- The twin pillars of public media, NZ On Air and RNZ, both need significant increased funding to enable more diverse New Zealand content, including high quality information programmes.
- Independent producers should provide the majority of the content.
- A new unfettered voice to Government would enable full public debate on the levels and purposes of public media funding.

3.0 THE ROLE OF GOVERNMENT IN SUPPORTING QUALITY AND INDEPENDENT INVESTIGATIVE JOURNALISM

3.1 SPADA believes the key role of government in public media is to ensure quality New Zealand content across a range of programme genres for the education and entertainment of New Zealand citizens.

3.2 Quality independent investigative journalism is a subset of this. A core function of public media is to provide the body politic with in-depth non-partisan news and current affairs to ensure an informed and engaged electorate.

4.0 HOW THE GOVERNMENT OF THE DAY COULD GET INDEPENDENT ANALYSIS OF THE PUBLIC MEDIA SECTOR'S HEALTH AND NEEDS

4.1 In order to provide government with an analysis of the public media sector's health and needs, a range of indicators would need to be developed in consultation with the sector and monitored over time.

4.2 These could include:

- Aggregating current measures of content and audiences provided by existing players such as NZ On Air, RNZ, Māori Television, NZFC and Te Māngai Pāho
- Analysing current industry statistics provided by Statistics New Zealand's Screen Industry Survey
- Qualitative and quantitative research into the health of the independent production sector; and
- Identification of gaps in the information base and taking steps to address any omissions.

CONCLUSIONS

- SPADA understands the merit of the proposed new Public Media Funding Commission to enable an unfettered voice to government recommending on funding levels and allocations for public media purposes.
- SPADA sees the key risk being an additional agency in an already crowded field (NZ On Air, RNZ, Māori Television, Te Māngai Pāho, NZFC), with the attendant costs and risks of overlap and territorial confusion.

SPADA welcomes the opportunity to engage with this process, and looks forward to ongoing discussion on these issues.

Yours sincerely



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