

## **Future of Broadcasting Working Group**

The Government's Media Policy Statement of 7 February 2022 announced a range of measures concerning media sector policy.

This included a \$7.3 million Television Research and Policy Development Program, to provide government and industry with the information needed to make choices about the future of free-to-air television in Australia, including analysis of:

- prominence issues associated with connected devices;
- the technical capability of Australia's television receiver fleet and how this is expected to change over time; and
- the attitudes, preferences and habits of Australian television consumers and how they are likely to evolve over coming years.

The Statement also indicated the Government would establish a Future of Broadcasting Working Group comprised of free-to-air broadcasters, consumer and broadcast technology bodies, transmission infrastructure providers, and smart television manufacturers.

Membership of the Working Group has since been finalised and its first meeting held. At this meeting, the Group agreed one of its early priorities will be considering whether regulatory measures are required to deal with the issue of prominence and if so, what form those measures should take.

Minister for Communications, Urban Infrastructure, Cities and the Arts, the Hon Paul Fletcher MP, said the Working Group was established so that the free-to-air television sector, the government and other stakeholders can work together to address the issues facing the sector, many of which are driven by rapid technology change and the rise of the internet.

“It has been a longstanding principle of broadcasting policy in Australia to maximise the availability of free to air television services to all Australians – both through advertising funded services delivered by commercial broadcasters, and through services delivered by the national broadcasters. This principle has underpinned other policy objectives such as requiring that at least 55 per cent of content on commercial free-to-air broadcasters is Australian,” Minister Fletcher said.

“The government is aware of reports that smart television manufacturers have approached Australian broadcasters – both commercial and public – proposing they should pay a fee to those manufacturers for their channels to be seen by viewers who purchase such smart TVs.

“This issue of the ‘prominence’ with which particular channels are seen on smart TVs is an important one. I look forward to receiving advice from the Working Group on this issue. I consider that an obvious question for the Working Group in developing its advice is whether the charging of such fees is consistent with the policy objective of maximising the availability of free-to-air television services.”

Minister Fletcher has written also to his United Kingdom Government counterpart, the Rt Hon Nadine Dorries MP, Secretary of State for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport, to enhance engagement between the Australian and United Kingdom Governments on the question of prominence reform. Discussions have commenced between senior officials.

The United Kingdom has been reviewing the prominence of public service broadcasters on connected devices for several years. This partnership will accelerate potential Australian reform timelines by drawing on findings from a series of United Kingdom consultation processes, including recommendations for new legislation to ensure the prominence of broadcasters on connected devices.

Other near-term television policy issues, including the future of anti-siphoning legislation (and whether laws should be extended to streaming services), continue to progress. The anti-siphoning list has been extended until April 2023 and will be reviewed before that time. This means that the list will be reviewed before broadcast deals for major sporting codes including the AFL, NRL, cricket and tennis expire.

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