

NZSWG

New Zealand Writers Guild
Puni Taatuhi O Aotearoa

SUBMISSION TO THE ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT,
SCIENCE AND INNOVATION COMMITTEE

AOTEAROA

NEW ZEALAND PUBLIC

MEDIA BILL

SEPTEMBER 2022

INTRODUCTION

New Zealand Writers Guild Puni Taatuhi o Aotearoa (NZWG) thanks the Economic Development, Science and Innovation Committee for the opportunity make a submission on the Aotearoa New Zealand Public Media Bill.

NZWG supports the intent behind the Bill, and the creation of a public media entity that is committed to its stated objectives.

We look forward to sharing how the viewpoint of screenwriters can better contribute to the future economic and cultural wellbeing of Aotearoa through this proposed Bill.

NZWG

NZWG is the professional membership association and registered trade union of Aotearoa New Zealand representing script writers, established in 1976. NZWG is committed to working in a way that adheres to the spirit and the principles of Te Tiriti o Waitangi. NZWG is a member of the International Affiliation of Writers Guilds (IAWG), Council of Trade Unions (CTU NZ) and WeCreate.

SCREENWRITERS OF AOTEAROA

Screenwriters cannot be categorised as a singular homogenous group. NZWG represents screenwriters in three broad categories.

1. **New and Emerging** — this group is the broadest and most diverse. From beginners to students to change-of-career professionals. Emerging screenwriters cross boundaries of age, ethnicity, and gender. There is significant funding and broadcasting support available to this group.
2. **Mid-Career** – Aotearoa’s most successful, yet most overlooked group of practitioners. These writers work on their own and others’ creations, collaborate with other writers, directors, and producers, and grow their own slate of original work. Mid-career writers work incredibly hard and earn their living at their craft, which is funded in Aotearoa. Yet once they have broken in with credits and produced work, they find there are fewer sustainable funding opportunities available to them.
3. **Experienced** — this is a fine group of screenwriters who have spent decades honing their craft, establishing their creative voice, and pushing through the glass-ceiling at mid-career point. Made possible by decades of support through NZ On Air, New Zealand Film Commission and Te Māngai Pāho funding their works for screen.

Screenwriters are one of the most resilient types of practitioners in the screen ecosystem. Writers are the “Research & Development” department of the screen industry, taking the most risk and working through the greatest number of rejections and failures in attempting to get scripts to screen. They work closely with their producing partners and have a solid understanding of the intricacies of the business of developing, funding, filming, and distribution of works for screens.

Screenwriters are the bedrock of the scripted screen industry. Directly responsible, alongside their producing partners, for the production pipeline that many other practitioners, broadcasters, and audiences rely on.

THE BILL

LONG TERM SUSTAINABILITY THROUGH LOCAL DRAMA

Scripted drama, comedy, and children’s series are the foundation of a long-term sustainable and resilient local screen industry. This genre has been directly responsible for the economic growth and the robust pipeline of production within the screen industry. And is the beating heart of storytelling in Aotearoa – the mirror that reflects us all.

We want to ensure that the Bill reflects the importance of futureproofing this genre. Requiring, in some way, the Bill to safeguard the foundation of the local screen industry – scripted longform content – through ringfenced funding or implementation of robust commissioning frameworks.

WHAT IS MISSING

The Bill has several critical areas, that to NZWG, seem to be missing. They are:

- Its obligation to work constructively, collaboratively, and meaningfully with the broader media ecosystem
- Safeguarding a key sustainable genre – scripted long form content
- Recognition and understanding of the value and potential of the screen industry’s ecosystem
- Ensuring that Māori perspectives are reflected in the development and delivery of content and services for and about Māori, including by providing opportunities for Māori participation
- Cross government connection and responsiveness
- Partnerships between government and private sector investment
- Investment in locally generated Intellectual Property
- Representing and reflecting the diversity of New Zealand’s communities

CLAUSES

PART 2, SUBPART 2 – 11 OBJECTIVES

NZWG supports the Screen Production and Development Association of New Zealand (SPADA) recommendations:

Under Objectives (1) the purpose of the Aotearoa New Zealand Public Media is to contribute to —

- (a) strong and distinctive New Zealand identity; and
- (b) valued, visible, and flourishing te reo Māori and tikanga Māori; and
- (c) an inclusive, enriched, and connected society; and
- (d) a healthy, informed, and participative democracy.

The inclusion of a new purpose with wording to the effect:

(e) a sustainable and resilient independent domestic screen production sector.

Under Objectives (2) the inclusion of three new objectives and sub heading with wording to the effect:

A sustainable and resilient independent domestic screen production sector

(m) work collaboratively with the independent screen sector to help support the diversity, capability, and sustainability of the broader media ecosystem:

(n) ensure reasonable provision is made to assist in the production of scripted drama (including children’s drama); and

(o) ensure that its commercial activities do not distort the market or gain an unfair competitive advantage.

SPADA believes these additions to the objectives, will help address the following:

- the entity’s market behaviours and its potential impact on the broader media ecosystem;
- consideration of the current funding landscape and the negative impact changes to the funding of scripted drama would have on the sustainability of the domestic screen sector;
- the need for the entity to generate revenue – and balance that with PBS outcomes
- its responsibility for capability building and upskilling of the sector.

Having a culturally rich, creatively innovative, and economically viable screen production sector is integral to bringing our stories to the screen, and therefore imperative to the entity’s commitment to contribute to a ‘strong and distinctive New Zealand identity’: it is through our stories that we see ourselves - it is also how we feel enriched, included, valued, visible - and in turn flourish.

CHARTER – PRINCIPLES

How does the PME intend to deliver on the following principles?

- 13 (1) (i) innovating and taking creative risks
- 13 (1) (j) aiming for the highest standards of quality and integrity

In market these objectives are achieved directly through targeted funding of development, production, and distribution of this content. NZWG would like to see the Bill better reflect its intended process to achieve these objectives. This reflection will need to look at increasing funding to the key screen funding agencies – NZ On Air, New Zealand Film Commission and Te Māngai Pāho – who play a leading role in achieving these stated principles.

PART 2, SUBPART 5 – DUTIES, CLAUSE 17

NZWG supports SPADA’s recommendation:

Clause 17 appears to be a catch-all for how the entity will engage with the media sector, however, the definition of “Media Entities” is narrow, and does not reflect the independent production sector or the broader media ecosystem in which it operates. SPADA supports changes to Clause 17, to include a broader more clearly articulated definition under Interpretations.

CONCLUSION

NZWG is dedicated to ensuring that this legislation, which will directly impact screen sector funding policies and processes, will prioritise the work of Aotearoa screen practitioners. NZWG supports this legislation as it works toward ensuring a sustainable, culturally vibrant, and economically prosperous Aotearoa New Zealand media ecosystem.

Humans have and will always seek out stories that reflect themselves, project themselves, or escape from themselves.

The technology, pathways and access points that deliver these stories will continue to evolve and change. But human nature will not. This legislation must ensure that any public entity will continue to promote screen storytellers and will continue to deliver vibrant, culturally specific, and high-quality drama and comedy for audiences in Aotearoa New Zealand and beyond.

We look forward to discussing these points further, and respectfully request an opportunity to present an oral submission to the Committee.

On behalf of Aotearoa Screenwriters,

Alice Shearman
Executive Director