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Screen industry needs certainty that content obligations will be reinstated

With screen productions resuming around the country, the temporary suspension of content obligations for new Australian drama, comedy and children's content on commercial television must be lifted, says the union for performers and crew.

The Media, Entertainment & Arts Alliance welcomes the call from Small Business Ombudsman Kate Carnell for the reinstatement of content regulations as soon as possible.

After production of Australian drama and kids programs was forced to shut down in March, commercial broadcasters were granted a waiver on their obligation to screen programs that could not be made for safety reasons.

However, with screen production now back in full force under industry-specific COVID safety guidelines, broadcasters should now be making commitments to commission new programs for the 2021 calendar year.

But this will only happen if there is certainty that the content rules will be back in place.

"The regulators need to give a clear commitment that audiences can expect to see new Australian drama, documentary and kids programs as usual in 2021," said MEAA chief executive Paul Murphy.

"While they fail to act, broadcasters will continue to hold off on locking in commissions of new work, leaving Australian audiences without seeing their stories on screen, and killing thousands of jobs in the screen industry.

"With the new COVID Safe guidelines, the industry has demonstrated that screen production can take place safely, so there is nothing to hold back the return of content obligations for commercial broadcasters.

"The federal government was recently proactive in announcing a new \$400 million in funding for offshore film production. Now we need to see a similar commitment by the government to Australian stories on screen by resuming our existing local content rules."

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