Securing audio description on Australian TV



Amend the Broadcasting Services Act to legally require the provision of Audio Description on free-to-air TV.

Audio Description is a service which provides information about on-screen content to people who are blind or have low vision, through a narration track which interjects between dialogue.

Access to Audio Description is about more than entertainment. If a person who is blind or has low vision can't enjoy the same programs as the rest of society, they are less likely to be included in conversation and community. Audio Description can provide potentially life-saving information which is usually only delivered as text (e.g. mental health hotlines, emergency information).

Article 30 of the United Nations' Convention on the Rights of Persons with a Disability[1], to which Australia is a signatory, says that governments should recognise the right to "enjoy access to television programmes, films, theatre and other cultural activities, in accessible formats."

Vision 2020 Australia acknowledges the investment of $4 million in the 2020/21 financial year to help the ABC and SBS deliver Audio Description. But there is no legal requirement for any TV network to deliver any amount of described content – a requirement enforced in the US, UK, Canada and New Zealand. Amendment to the Broadcasting Services Act, similar to the legal mandate which has required provision of closed captions for people who are Deaf or hard of hearing since 1998, will be needed to require free to air TV to provide audio description.

This amendment would:

1. Require all free-to-air TV channels to provide a minimum amount of Audio Description per week. This amount would be set at:
   a) 14 hours per week in the first three years following implementation
   b) 21 hours per week in the fourth year following implementation and
   c) 28 hours per week from the fifth year following implementation.
2. Set quality standards for the provision of Audio Description, similar to those provided in the UK.
3. Require Audio Description that is broadcast on live television to also be available for on-demand or catch-up viewing.
4. Align with Australia's Disability Strategy 2021-2023 in ensuring people with disability are able to fully participate in cultural life and information and communication systems are accessible, reliable and responsive.

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[1] United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs, Article 30 – Participation in cultural life, recreation, leisure and sport https://www.un.org/development/desa/disabilities/convention-on-the-rights-of-persons-with-disabilities/article-30-participation-in-cultural-life-recreation-leisure-and-sport.html