



AUSTRALIA

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Access to local TV services and free sport under threat unless laws are strengthened

Millions of Australians will be unable to watch the biggest sporting events or find free TV services on their smart devices if crucial changes are not made to a federal bill, according to Free TV.

The peak body for free TV broadcasters, including Seven, Nine and Ten, said the Prominence and Anti-siphoning Bill must be strengthened to achieve its intended outcomes.

“In its current form the bill does not guarantee the availability of free sporting coverage for those who are reliant on the internet for their free TV viewing and sets an unnecessarily long timeframe to secure the availability of free local TV services on smart TVs,” said Free TV CEO Bridget Fair.

“These two major oversights must be fixed to protect the free universal access of local TV services and sport for every Australian.”

The bill prevents subscription streaming services such as Amazon, Apple and Disney from buying exclusive terrestrial broadcast rights to iconic sporting events like the Olympics, AFL, NRL and cricket, but they can still acquire exclusive digital rights and lock out the millions of Australians who watch free sport on services such as 7plus, 9Now and 10 Play.

“As the proportion of households watching TV online grows to half by 2027, the anti-siphoning list will be fundamentally undermined if it does not apply to digital rights,” said Ms Fair.

“Bidding for sport will become commercially unviable if free-to-air broadcasters can only acquire a narrow range of terrestrial rights, leaving paid services to acquire all sporting events.

“This is exactly the nightmare scenario the government is trying to avoid with this bill - so it must be amended to reflect modern viewing habits.

“Many new homes do not even have antennas installed. All Australians deserve access to the great sporting events, trusted news and great entertainment programs that bring our nation together, regardless of their income or whether they have an antenna on their home.”

Meanwhile, the bill only requires the free apps of local broadcasters and a Live TV tile be available on new smart TVs that are manufactured 18 months after the legislation receives assent.

“This needless delay will mean millions of people who buy new TVs will unnecessarily miss out on the benefits of this bill.

“There is no good reason to delay enforcing the rules beyond six months after they become law at the absolute maximum,” said Ms Fair.

“The government should also apply the new rules to existing TVs - not just new ones - with expert analysis showing software can easily be updated to benefit people who already have a smart TV. The problem of not being able to find local TV services is something people are experiencing already. If we wait until 2026 to even start addressing the problem it will simply be too little too late.”

Free TV is calling for the following changes to the bill:

Prominence

- Reduce the implementation period from 18 months to a maximum of six months
- Extend the rules to existing TVs that receive software updates
- Ensure that viewers are presented with both free and paid options when searching for content
- Require electronic TV guides to include local free TV services

Anti-siphoning

- Require that both the free broadcast and free digital streaming rights be acquired by a free broadcaster before the event can be acquired by a pay TV or subscription streaming provider
- Do not extend the automatic de-listing period from six to 12 months as many sporting events are acquired within this timeframe

Free TV Submission regarding the Communications Legislation Amendment (Prominence and Anti- siphoning) Bill 2023 – link [here](#)

ENDS

For media enquiries, please contact:

Bridget Fair
Chief Executive Officer
Free TV Australia
M: 0417 260 478
E: bfair@freetv.com.au

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