

Media Release
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Senate Committee recommendations miss the mark

Free TV today called for a serious rethink of the findings of the Senate Environment and Communications Legislation Committee's inquiry into new laws to keep sport free on TV and make sure local Australian TV services are easy to find.

Responding to the Committee's report, Bridget Fair, Free TV CEO, said "Overall the Committee recommendations represent a major missed opportunity to ensure that all Australians can benefit from free local TV services into the future.

While we welcome the Committee's recommendation to reduce the implementation period for the new prominence framework from 18 to 12 months, the report misses the mark by not applying the new requirements to existing sets in the market. Every person with a connected TV sees the look and feel of their existing set updated on a regular basis. The changes required to implement the new prominence rules are no different.

Unless we incorporate existing sets in the prominence framework, only those who buy a new TV will see any change, and people who can't afford to upgrade their sets will miss out, even though their connected TV sets can be, and regularly are, updated over the internet.

If we don't make this important change, the legislation will not make any meaningful difference until late this decade.

The Committee misses the mark on ensuring iconic sport remains free for all Australians too.

"The increasing number of Australians who watch their free sport on TV using the internet, because they have no aerial, will miss out unless the new laws are amended to stop paid streaming services buying up exclusive digital rights and putting sports behind a paywall.

"We're running a real risk that in the not too distant future, if you want to watch your favourite sports, you will need to pay multiple streaming services to do so. Knowing that every Australian can freely access the big footy finals or gather around the TV for the Boxing Day cricket will be a thing of the past.

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 exclusive digital coverage. 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.

The Communications Legislation Amendment (Prominence and Anti-siphoning) Bill 2023 is an important piece of legislation that should ensure that all Australians can continue to access their free local TV services and free sport. But unless these critical changes are made, we’re going to continue to have analog rules in a digital world.

“Our industry is ready to work constructively with the Government and other key MPs to support these important amendments,” Ms Fair said.

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ABOUT FREE TV AUSTRALIA

Free TV Australia is a leading media industry organisation. It represents all of Australia’s commercial free-to-air television licensees through advocacy, innovation and strategic advice. The members of Free TV Australia are Seven West Media, Nine Entertainment Co, Network 10, Southern Cross Austereo, WIN Network and Imparja Television.