



CRTC “Let’s Talk TV” – The Way Forward?

For Immediate Release – Toronto – March 12, 2015 – Earlier today CRTC Chairman Jean-Pierre Blais spoke to the Canadian Club of Ottawa about the future of the Canadian television industry. The decision, titled “The Way Forward – Creating Compelling and Diverse Canadian Programming,” is the second of several decisions stemming from the CRTC’s “Let’s Talk TV” initiative, begun in 2013.

The decision is complex, and its many implications will become clearer in the coming weeks and months. At this juncture, a positive is that a cornerstone of the Canadian programming support framework — expenditure requirements for “programs of national interest” (PNI), which include drama and documentary programming — is being maintained.

WGC Executive Director Maureen Parker says, “That the Commission continues to recognize the place of Canadian programming in the Canadian broadcasting system is encouraging. PNI is a vital element behind the current success of Canadian TV. It’s also heartening to see the recognition of the role of the Canadian screenwriter, and consistent funding for Canadian content.”

Recognition of the screenwriter was evidenced through a new Canadian certification process for two “pilot projects” of certain live-action drama/comedy productions. One is based on the adaptation of best-selling, Canadian-authored novels, and one involves shows budgeted at over \$2 million/hour. In both cases, a Canadian screenwriter will be required. Nonetheless, the WGC was surprised that the certification process, and the undermining of the terms of trade agreement for producers and broadcasters, were part of this announcement. Both decisions were made without notice or meaningful discussion in the preceding hearing.

Less unexpected, but also of concern, is what Chairman Blais has referred to as a “quality over quantity” approach, underscored in today’s decision. The WGC maintains that quantity and quality are linked concepts, as there is no one recipe to create a hit show, and creating fewer shows may serve to reduce the chances of a single show’s success.

Of greatest concern in today’s decision is the continuation of a two-tier broadcasting model, with “over-the-top” services like Netflix, CraveTV and shomi remaining almost entirely outside of the regulatory sphere. As Chairman Blais said today, Canada’s regulatory regime must be forward-looking, and Canadian content still requires support to survive and thrive. If more and more viewing migrates to unlicensed platforms, and those services have no requirements to make Canadian shows, the WGC questions how such an approach is sustainable in the medium to long term.

For more information, please contact Li Robbins, Writers Guild of Canada, at l.robbins@wgc.ca

The Writers Guild of Canada (WGC) represents more than 2,200 professional English-language screenwriters across Canada. These are the creators who write the Canadian entertainment we enjoy on our televisions, movie screens and digital platforms.