

Television and Archives: Friends, Neighbours or Getaway?

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The role that television has played in western cultures over the last 50 years has engaged a wide range of researchers in considering its power and influence in society. In addition, the popular belief in the power and influence of television, together with its role as a mirror, reflecting community values and expectations, suggests that it is an important communications medium that should be collected and preserved in a manner that ensures access is available for future researchers. This paper investigates the nature and extent of holdings of Logie Award television programs in the nation's major publicly-funded archives. The results suggest that while there are major gaps, overall holdings are generally good, with representative or comprehensive collections being maintained across most genres.

Introduction

The impact of television on all aspects of modern life has been widely acknowledged, with a recent report on its introduction into the Himalayan kingdom of Bhutan emphasising the negative influence it has had on a

traditional culture.¹ From its mass adoption in the early-1950s until relatively recently, the part played by television in shaping, and reflecting, everyday life has been viewed by many with disquiet.² That this influence – for good or bad – may now be waning with increasing use of the World Wide Web for entertainment and information does not diminish the importance of the role that television has played in western cultures in particular, over the last 50 years. The large number of studies into the role of television undertaken during this period testifies to the high level of interest, fascination and concern that the medium has engendered across a range of societies.

Very early in the evolution of television into the major communication medium of its time, both Leo Bogart³ and Elliott⁴ were looking closely at its role across the broad spectrum of American life – including its political impact and the part it played as a medium of mass culture. A few years later, the televised debates between John F Kennedy and Richard Nixon (the first by presidential candidates) were popularly seen as having influenced voters, providing the edge for Kennedy to win the 1960 presidential election. This prompted Kurt Lang and Gladys Engel Lang⁵ to consider the impact and role of televised debates in a more formal manner while 40 years later, this particular series of debates is still being analysed as to the effect televised images have on audience reactions.⁶

The next decade saw increasing attention to the role of television and in particular, news and documentaries associated with the Vietnam War with the perception that, for the first time, war was brought into the viewer's lounge room, mediated by the networks, not the government. As Daniel C Challin noted, 'Defeat in Vietnam has left the United States deeply divided and no issue has been more bitterly divisive than the role of the media'. He then went on to quote President Richard Nixon, 'Whatever the intention behind such relentless and literal reporting of the war, the result was a serious demoralization of the home front ...'⁷ This view that television was instrumental in America's defeat in Vietnam was taken seriously by the military, with the result that they have attempted to impose far more control on coverage of subsequent conflicts. This, together with the nature of modern guerrilla warfare has, according to Cockburn, led to problems with television reporting of warfare which he summarised in commenting on the second Gulf war:

The Iraq conflict is the great crisis of our era, but television has found it impossible to cover it properly. The dangers to

correspondent and crew are too great, and the limitations of being embedded with the US or British armies subvert balanced coverage.⁸

Research into the impact of television, particularly on children, has continued with the emphasis on its problematic role in personal development.⁹ However, more recently, there have been efforts made to exploit the popularity of the medium for positive purposes. Organisations such as ClearVision are proposing the adaption of traditional entertainment formats, such as the TV serial drama or soap opera, to role model issues – and solutions – related to topical events such as global warming.¹⁰ This would involve developing new programs or having direct input into the direction of existing shows. Again, the existence of such an organisation, with its mission statement of *strategic entertainment for positive social change* reinforces the view that television is seen as a key component in shaping behaviours and opinions, across a broad range of human activity.

This popular belief in the power and influence of television, together with its role as a mirror, reflecting community values and expectations, suggests that it is an important communications medium that should be collected and preserved in a manner that ensures access is available for future researchers and social commentators. Like newspapers, which libraries have been assiduously acquiring for many years, television programs are an important primary resource that can provide richer and fuller coverage of an event or insight into popular attitudes and activities. As an example, consider coverage of an election night – the print media can provide comprehensive details and analysis, but will find it difficult to convey depths of emotion and feeling that live television, by its very nature, is so good at providing. It would seem that for anyone interested in understanding fully the events of that election night, having access to both print and broadcast media covering the event is essential.

The use of broadcast documentaries, current affairs or television news as a research tool is reasonably widespread. Examples can be drawn across a range of disciplines including: history;¹¹ politics;¹² medicine and psychology;¹³ and sociology.¹⁴ In addition, drama, soap operas and other fictional content has also been seen as a rich resource for study across areas such as: women's studies;¹⁵ ethics;¹⁶ and psychiatry and law.¹⁷ The use of television as a source of material to research (in addition to research conducted on television itself) suggests that it is taken seriously by a

wide range of disciplines across the academic spectrum. If this is the case, then it would seem logical that collections of television material should therefore figure prominently in those institutions supporting academic research, with the library being the obvious place to house such a resource in order to make it available to all potential researchers, institution wide.

Yet in a recent survey of holdings of audiovisual collections in Australia undertaken by the National Film and Sound Archive (NFSA), very few university libraries responded and of those that did, most reported material created by staff or students, or collections specifically targeted to the role of the library. For example, the Bob Hawke Ministerial Library at the University of South Australia with its holdings of audio and video material relating to this former Australian prime minister.¹⁸ Some state libraries, and the National Library of Australia, responded to the survey but the emphasis of their reported moving image holdings were film, not television collections.

The outcomes of this national survey would suggest that major holdings of television materials in Australia do not exist outside what may be held at the NFSA (whose mission is 'To preserve Australia's audio-visual culture for all to enjoy')¹⁹ and the National Archives of Australia (NAA) with their legislative requirements, and by the broadcasters themselves, the national television networks. This situation limits the potential availability of material to researchers and raises concerns over the long-term preservation of television given the reliance upon two resources, the NFSA and NAA, or the producers and broadcasters themselves for whom preservation for cultural or research purposes is not a primary concern. Thus in order to clarify the situation and ascertain how readily available Australian television productions are to researchers, a survey was undertaken of holdings of key titles.

Research design

The vast amount of television produced in Australia over the last 50 years makes building a collection aimed at comprehensive coverage a daunting prospect for any organisation. In the latest survey from the Australian Bureau of Statistics on the television industry for the years 2002-03, they reported 54,743 commercial broadcast hours for first release productions during this period (from commercial free-to-air services and subscription services).²⁰ Not all of this would be Australian productions

but in that number, the two largest segments, sports (with 23,556 hours) and news and current affairs (17,837 hours) would be predominantly Australian content. This level of output, produced and distributed on varying media (various videotape formats, digital files and so on) and with all its related rights complexities, makes the acquisition of any meaningful level of output by a collecting institution a costly as well as complex task. In addition, the lack of legal deposit legislation for audiovisual material, including television productions, increases the difficulties with a need to rely upon voluntary agreements and individually negotiated conditions for acquisitions from each producer. The situation regarding legal deposit is currently under review as part of a more comprehensive assessment of legal deposit legislation in the digital environment.²¹

Given this volume of output and difficulties in acquisition, selective rather than comprehensive collecting is likely to be the most practical approach for any organisation interested in developing collections of broadcast television material. This then raises the question of criteria for identifying materials for acquisition and the basis upon which those criteria are established. While such criteria will be very much influenced by the objectives of the collecting organisation, it may be possible to use more generic criteria that are less situation specific. Thus critical or popular success are two factors that would seem to be useful tools in identifying, from the mass of material broadcast, titles for acquisition and longer term preservation.

For the purposes of this study it was therefore decided to focus on programs receiving popular recognition, and those noted by the industry itself as having merit, as being the key titles significant in understanding and appreciating Australian television production and its impact on Australian society. These criteria were therefore used to identify particular titles that, given their success, may be of interest to current or future researchers.

In order to discover titles with popular or critical acclaim, it was decided to use the TV Week Logie Award winners to identify productions. The Logies have been awarded since 1959 (three years after television commenced in Australia) and while the format and categories have changed over the years, the basic premise, recognising excellence (both popular and critical) in television has remained the same. Some awards are given on the basis of a popular vote, thus recognising the success of

programs from the viewer's perspective; while some are nominated through an industry (peer) panel, recognising their achievement within the industry itself.²²

In a wide-ranging review of the Logies Award Show, J McConchie and KA Vered debate the role of the show and its awards, noting that one of its supposed aims is to assert a notion of Australian identity.²³ While McConchie and Vered emphasise the populist nature of the televised awards and generally, the award-winning productions themselves, they go on to affirm 'The Logies, however, do make a stake for accepting consumer culture and its practices as part of Australian national identity'.²⁴

Comments such as these support the validity of using Logie winners as a discrete group of titles important to the landscape of Australian popular culture. The range of award categories, which, while it has varied over the years, does provide a good cross-section of the major categories of television production (including documentaries, drama and children's programs) also makes the Logie Award winners a useful basis upon which to assess the coverage and depth of any television collection.

Thus all Logie Award winners from 1959 to 2005 given to individual programs or series (as opposed to those awarded to actors or presenters) were entered into a number of spreadsheets based on broad genres. A total of 223 program titles were recorded in the categories of documentaries, news and current affairs, light entertainment (including comedy and lifestyle), series (soaps and serious drama), and children's programming. Programs were placed into these categories based upon the title of the Logie Award received. For practical purposes, it was decided to reduce the number included in the research sample using the following approach:

Documentaries	all 55 titles
Current affairs	all 12 titles
Children's programs	only multi-award winners, 6 titles
Series	multi-award winners, 14 titles, plus one standalone drama for each alternate year, another 19 titles, making 33 titles in total
Sport	all 8 titles

Light entertainment	only multi-award winners, 24 titles
Commercials	not included (it was decided to exclude TV commercials, despite the sometimes iconic status they achieved, within the scope of this current study – given the importance of this sector, TV advertisements will form the focus of a further paper)

Thus a total of 138 titles comprised the research sample (out of the potential 223). Holdings for these titles were then checked using Libraries Australia, the catalogue of the Australian Film, Television and Radio School (AFTRS), the NFSA catalogue and, for Australian Broadcasting Corporation (ABC) productions only, the publicly searchable ABC databases and the NAA's RecordSearch database.

Libraries Australia hosts the Australian National Bibliographic Database comprising details on over 42 million items held across a broad range of Australian libraries (National Library of Australia, 2008), including the National Library, state libraries, all university libraries and many special libraries.²⁵ It also holds material from the National Film and Video Lending Service maintained by the NFSA. Not all material held within a library is necessarily placed onto this national database and it may be that television materials in particular, if copied off-air and thus limited to use within that particular institution, are held on local catalogues only. However, the absence of any such in-house collections reported in the NFSA survey noted earlier, suggests that, if they exist, they would be difficult to find and that access would be highly problematic. Nonetheless, it is one of the limitations of this research that material not catalogued on Libraries Australia or on the ABC, NAA, AFTRS or NFSA catalogues will not be reported.

Apart from this, the audiovisual holdings of the NFSA, NAA and ABC are not generally included in Libraries Australia and thus a separate search of their catalogues was undertaken. The NFSA in particular is charged with the collection and preservation of Australia's audiovisual heritage and thus should be a rich resource while the ABC maintains a large collection of their own material which eventually is passed to the National Archives of Australia once its commercial life is considered to be over.

In addition, with many titles being released on DVD, commercial availability was also checked via the ABC shop²⁶ and EzyDVD, promoted as Australia's largest online DVD store.²⁷

Results

Using the various online public access catalogues to access institutional catalogues raised a number of issues relating to their design and data quality. In many instances it was difficult to determine the exact nature and extent of the holdings for a particular title. There were issues related to duplicate entries on catalogues, the segmenting of individual titles so that there were multiple entries for the one program (current affairs programs in particular), the breaking up of a title into its physical components (for example, soundtrack, vision) which then count as separate entities, the lack of effective series entries and the general difficulty of searching for titles without unique names across very large databases. In many cases, a researcher may be able to get a general idea that what they are looking for is held or not, but would then need to contact the institution to determine more precisely what is available.

Where numbers are reported below therefore, they need to be seen as indicative and not necessarily an exact statement of holdings by a particular institution.

Documentaries

Table 1 shows the percentage of documentaries from each decade that are available, in one form or another, through one of the resources searched. Overall, of the 54 Logie Award-winning documentaries over the period, it is possible to find copies (not necessarily complete) of 42 titles. Not surprisingly, older material shows the most gaps with titles created in the last twenty years the most accessible. From the late-1970s onward, the vast majority of titles are available via a Libraries Australia participant, suggesting relatively easy access for any researcher. Generally, these will be held in DVD or domestic video formats, raising the issue of longer term preservation (and thus ongoing accessibility). However, close to 40% of titles are held in full or part by the NFSA suggesting that long-term preservation of these titles is more assured. In addition, 13 of the 27 productions broadcast on the ABC are held there

and likely to be properly preserved by the ABC itself or NAA given their commitments under the *Archives Act 1983*.

Overall, the availability of these award-winning documentaries therefore seems generally good with the prospects for at least half of them being preserved for the longer term positive. The nature of documentaries, often comprising only one or a small number of episodes makes their acquisition and processing relatively easy and also makes them attractive for repackaging as DVDs or in other readily accessible formats attractive to generalist collections. Major documentary series such as the ABC's *Chequerboard*, *A Big Country* and *Australian Story*, running to hundreds of programs broadcast over many years are more problematic and holdings generally for these are difficult to establish with confidence and may be incomplete. For example, of the 370 *A Big Country* programs broadcast 1968–91, NAA reports 474 holdings (probably an example of separate entries for soundtracks and the film component, or of each story within a program being separately identified), the ABC around 200 and the NFSA 40. To establish the degree to which complete programs exist would require examination of each entry. Libraries Australia shows 44 programs are held in 99 libraries. Some of the earlier episodes may have been passed on to NAA by the ABC but, assuming there is likely to be double-up on the programs held across institutions, it is likely that up to a third of these productions are no longer accessible.

For programs like these with long production runs, the practical considerations of acquiring, describing and preserving the entire output do have to be taken into account with the likelihood that in reality, sampling is inevitable and complete runs unlikely to be held indefinitely.

Current affairs

Unlike documentaries that are often one-offs or have relatively short, finite lives, many current affairs programs run for a very long time. For example, *60 Minutes* has been broadcast in Australia since 1979 and *Four Corners* since 1961 with some, such as *A Current Affair* (which started in 1971), being broadcast every weekday. This volume of output makes building and maintaining comprehensive collections highly challenging. Together with the need for high level cataloguing, describing and indexing individual stories covered in each program, the resource intensive nature of such collections can become a major burden for any organisation. Yet

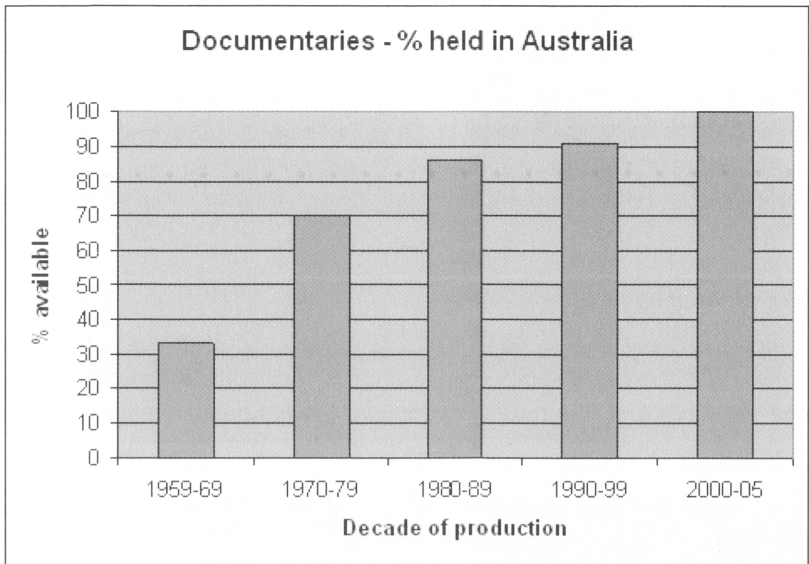


Table 1. Logie Award-winning documentaries and the percentage held in Australia

the program content, dealing with topical issues of concern across a wide spectrum from international events to problems with the neighbours, makes them a valuable research resource.

The level of holdings shown by the survey highlights the difficulties organisations have in building and maintaining collections of current affairs materials. For the major titles, Libraries Australia members report over 100 libraries holding small numbers of individual programs (in most cases presumably copied off-air and available only under limited conditions within the organisation). The ABC holds good collections of *Four Corners* (over 1,100 programs) and *Foreign Correspondent*, while the NFSA holds what appears to be representative collections from *A Current Affair* (around 400 programs, 1974–2008), *Today Tonight* (around 400 programs, 1995–2008) and *60 Minutes* (around 200 programs, 1986–2000). The NFSA also holds a number of *Four Corners* broadcasts (around 400 programs, 1963 – mid-1990s) although the general policy today would

be for ABC productions to be preserved by NAA, which has holdings of nearly 2,000 *Four Corners* items. The smaller current affairs programs which ran for shorter periods are generally poorly covered.

Overall, for the Logie Award-winning current affairs programs, samples across their entire life cycle should be easy to find. To find a publicly available specific broadcast, unless it was an ABC production, may be a lot more difficult.

Children's programs

The small number of children's programs included in this research makes it difficult to draw firm conclusions from the findings. However, from the titles surveyed it seems that access for most non-ABC productions is very hit and miss. The early ABC production *Adventure Island*, with over 1,200 episodes broadcast 1967–73, survives virtually complete in the NAA collection, while *Wombat*, broadcast on the 7 Network 1970s–1990, appears to be represented by only four programs held at the NFSA. However, *Simon Townsend's Wonder World*, with 2,000-plus episodes broadcast during a similar time period, survives with nearly 500 episodes at the NFSA. More recent productions such as the popular ABC series *Round the Twist* are readily available on DVD.

For children's programs in particular, it seems that public availability of older non-ABC productions is likely to be problematic and while samples may be found, larger holdings illustrating the development or evolution of a program over time, may not exist.

Series and drama

This category includes long-running series such as *Homicide* as well as short mini-series such as *The Battlers*. As already noted, long-running programs do create problems for collecting institutions and this category contains some of the longest running and highest output titles. Thus soaps such as *Neighbours* (started 1985) and *Home and Away* (1988) broadcast five times weekly for 40 weeks or more each year, create a vast amount of programming, highly popular with audiences, but difficult to acquire and process in a systematic, ordered fashion. The result seems to be that for many of these large series, significant holdings can be found at the NFSA (for example, around 400 episodes of *Neighbours*, virtually all 700 of *Prisoner*, and 500-plus of *Blue Heelers*), but that the holdings are

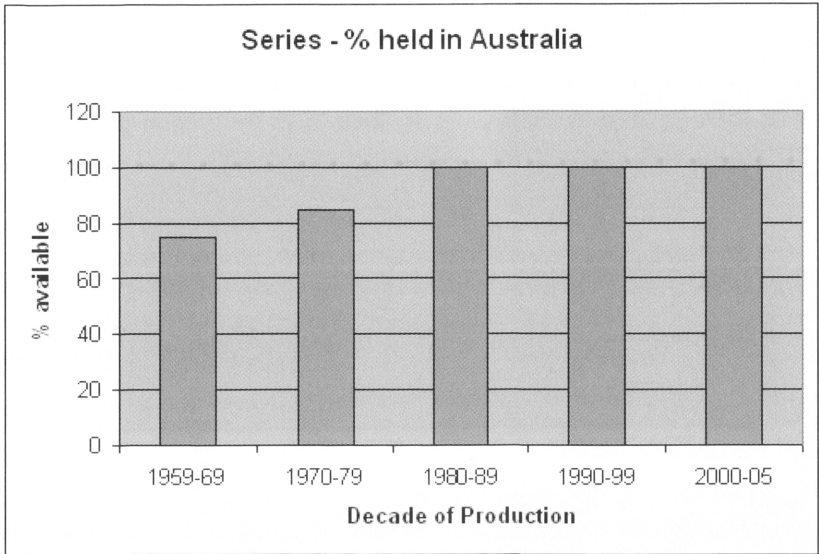


Table 2. Logie Award-winning series and drama productions and the percentage held in Australia

not always spread out across the period of production but represent a concentrated collecting effort at one particular time (for example, for *Neighbours* the vast majority of programs held are from the mid-1990s). For series such as these, commercially produced DVDs featuring highlights or seminal episodes are generally available and widely held in a range of libraries (for example, *Home and Away – Weddings* is reported to be held by seven libraries via Libraries Australia).

Table 2 illustrates that, from the sample studied, for post-1980 productions, some or all of a series is available in one form or another within Australia. Again, not surprisingly, it is the earlier productions that may be more difficult to find.

As with the other categories, the survey indicates wide-ranging holdings of most titles, many being held by the NFSA and thus presumed as having the potential for long-term preservation. There are anomalies though, an example being the series *Sons and Daughters* (described as ‘the most watched Australian soap of the 1980s’)²⁸ with 972 episodes broadcast

but only around 25 held by the NFSA. However, for most series, holdings are good and while individual episodes may be difficult to track down, enough examples are available for most titles to provide a useful resource for any researcher working in this area.

Sport

Only seven programs fell into this category and despite their popularity with viewers it is the most poorly represented category in this survey. There appears to be no extensive holdings of any of the sports Logie winning productions and while individual programs covering specific sporting events, such as finals, may be held, representative collections across an entire series are not evident.

Light entertainment

This category comprised programs featuring comedy (including satire with programs such as the *Mavis Bramston Show* and *Fast Forward*), variety (for example, *Young Talent Time*, *Hey Hey it's Saturday*), reality (for example, *RPA* focusing on the Royal Prince Alfred Hospital) and lifestyle (for example, *Burke's Backyard*). These productions have figured prominently in the Logie Awards since their inception and continue to hold a high profile. They are generally selected by popular vote of TV Week readers.

Virtually all of the titles researched had holdings somewhere available to researchers. However these holdings are often very limited. Libraries Australia generally reports limited holdings – usually a 'Best of' on DVD and the major preservation resource, the NFSA, shows a small number of titles well covered (including the *Mavis Bramston Show*) but samples for most others in very small numbers. Thus only a handful of titles are held for long-running programs such as *Hey Hey it's Saturday*, *Sale of the Century*, *Perfect Match* and *Burke's Backyard*. Considering the popularity of such programs (each won multiple Logies) and their longevity (over 20 years in the case of *Hey Hey*) it is reasonable to assert that holdings in single figures do not adequately represent the nature, content and style of the program as it evolved over time.

Discussion

The holdings identified through this process suggest that while the acquisition of program titles appears to have been a fairly haphazard

process (except for the ABC and NAA whose retention and preservation responsibilities are clearly delineated in legislation), there are generally reasonable holdings of many of the most significant programs produced and broadcast in Australia. The exception, surprisingly enough given Australia's strong fascination with sporting prowess, are those weekly sports programs that draw large audiences and feature regularly in the top 40 program ratings.²⁹

Commercially produced programs with long production runs, often enormously popular (otherwise their life would be more short-lived!) have proved to be problematic for systematic collecting. While holdings are often quite substantial, for most there are gaps and inconsistencies. One year's production may be held in its entirety while the next five years are virtually missing. For others, one series may be held in its entirety while another has only minimal representation (for example, for police dramas, the NFSA holds virtually the entire output of *Homicide* – over 500 episodes, while its holdings of *Division 4* are around one quarter of a total production of 300 episodes). The reasons for this can be many and complex but may include: the loss of the original material completely – it no longer exists; the producers or broadcasters are unwilling to make it available; or the capacity of the NFSA, as the major player in this area, to prioritise this activity amongst its other responsibilities.

The majority of commercial programming is held by the NFSA which confirms that it is fulfilling its role as the major resource for finding Australian audiovisual materials. It is also reassuring that, given the role of the NFSA in preservation activity, it is likely that these titles have a better chance of long-term survival (and thus accessibility) than those held outside of the major archival institutions. As a public institution it also means that accessibility within this Canberra-based archive (or its Sydney and Melbourne offices and other state access centres), is relatively assured and open to researchers able to visit a capital city.

From the results of this survey it seems that access through university libraries, for anything other than major documentaries or the occasional 'Best of', will be highly problematic. This also true for commercially available material, and the holdings of AFTRS where most items held would only be viewable on site.

The success of the ABC and NAA in maintaining significant collections of the national broadcaster's productions stands out and suggests that

for much of their output, copies will be available. However, access to these copies may not be straightforward given the limitations on accessing current ABC material and again there is the need to be physically present at a NAA reading room in Canberra or the state capitals.

The commercial networks themselves maintain archives of their own material. The nature and extent of these were not followed up as part of this paper but no doubt, to some degree, they would also hold material that may be made available to researchers under certain circumstances. However, given the role of these broadcasters, archiving material that is seen as no longer possessing commercial value is unlikely to be a high priority and provision of access to non-industry personnel likely to also be a low priority.

Conclusion

This research shows that the availability of Logie Award-winning programs in publicly accessible archives is good. While complete runs, or specific episodes, of some long-running commercial programs may be hard to find, enough examples exist for most titles to provide useful indications as to the nature and content of the program concerned. For ABC titles, availability for most productions is very good.

One of the difficulties researchers will encounter is in the nature of the public access catalogues which, for the major archives – NFSA and NAA – are not particularly well designed for general access, inevitably leading to personal, telephone or email enquiries directly to the institution. Serious work on improving these interfaces and the manner in which search results are presented would help reduce the need for inquiry, with searchers confident that their online searching has or has not provided them with the information they required.

Overall, while universities appear to have played a very small part in building and maintaining collections of broadcast television material, the major national resources of the NFSA and NAA have built substantial and wide-ranging collections in most areas with the possible exception of sport and children's television. Research into the access conditions attached to these institution's holdings was not undertaken at this stage, and will form part of a further paper.

Additional work in researching the holdings of the commercial broadcasters and the ability to access those holdings also needs to be undertaken before a comprehensive understanding of the nature and extent of broadcast television archiving of Australian productions can be determined.

(Note: the author is happy to provide the full results of the searches conducted on request.)

Endnotes

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²⁶ See ABC Shop website <<http://shop.abc.net.au/browse/format.asp?formatid=2>> accessed April 2009.

²⁷ See EzyDVD website at <<http://www.ezydvd.com.au/>> accessed April 2009.

²⁸ See Sons and Daughters tribute website, available at <<http://sonsanddaughters.co.uk/background/factsandstats/factsandstats.htm>> accessed April 2009.

²⁹ ThinkTV, Weekly ratings report, week 16, 13–19 April 2008, available at <http://www.thinktv.com.au/media/Media_Releases/Week_16_2008_-_Weekly_Ratings_Report.pdf> accessed April 2009.