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## **Media changes a welcome first step**

The subscription television sector has welcomed a holistic media reform package announced today by the Government.

“The changes are a modest but welcome first step in the reform process, and will be supported by subscription television if adopted as a comprehensive package,” Australian Subscription Television & Radio Association CEO, Andrew Maiden, said today.

“ASTRA is pleased Minister Fifield pursued broad rather than piecemeal reform, and involved the entire media industry in the development of a package that addresses the broad concerns of all participants,” Mr Maiden said.

The Government’s media overhaul will include minor modernisation of the sports anti-siphoning scheme, which protects the opportunity for free-to-air television to bid unchallenged for rights to broadcast more than 1300 events.

“Though these changes are a modest first step, they are welcome and timely given how profoundly the environment has changed since the anti-siphoning scheme was introduced in the early 1990s, when the only way to watch sport was on television and relatively few Australians paid for media services,” Mr Maiden said.

“Wherever subscription television has been permitted to broadcast sport under the current rules, sports fans and sporting codes have been winners with substantial new investment leading to more choice and better quality broadcasts,” he said.

ASTRA said further reform to the anti-siphoning scheme would be essential in the future as technology and viewing habits continued to change.

“As more Australians pay to watch content on digital platforms not regulated by the anti-siphoning scheme, it will be essential to continue winding back regulation on incumbent platforms like subscription television,” Mr Maiden said.

“Subscription television invests billions in local content and create jobs, and should not face more regulation than the digital services with which it competes,” he said.

ASTRA has long argued for reform to the anti-siphoning scheme, but did not seek to overturn the free-to-air television industry’s exclusive opportunity to bid for broadcast rights to iconic national sports including the AFL, NRL or the Melbourne Cup.

ASTRA also said the subscription television sector appreciated community concern about gambling advertising but was disappointed to have been swept into further restrictions, despite having taken a conservative approach to the placement and frequency of such commercials.

Subscription viewers currently see no gambling ads between sirens during the most popular sports broadcasts, and can use tools to restrict their access to unwanted channels or content. They can also choose to subscribe or not at any time.

“Subscription television has taken a conservative approach by strictly limiting gambling ads in key sports, and received only three formal complaints last year,” Mr Maiden said.

ASTRA will urge the Opposition and Senate cross bench members to support the media reform package in its entirety.

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**About ASTRA** – ASTRA is the peak body representing the subscription media industry in Australia. Members include television operators, content companies, technology companies and the industries that support them. In 2015/16 the industry invested nearly \$900 million in local production, filming in more than 200 cities and communities across Australia, creating 8339 jobs.