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No aerial? No free sport

An information sheet from Seven West Media

Why the Anti-Siphoning Bill needs to change to ensure all Aussies can get free sport

If you are a sports fan in Australia, you probably enjoy watching your favourite teams and athletes compete in the biggest events on free-to-air TV. Whether it's the AFL Grand Final, the Australian summer of cricket or the Matildas doing Australia proud, we expect – and deserve – to see these iconic sporting moments and cheer on our heroes without paying a cent.

But did you know:

The only reason that Aussies can view these sports for free is because the Government has legislated that certain iconic sports must be offered to TV broadcasters first so that they don't end up behind a paywall.

This is known as the anti-siphoning scheme. But it is outdated and only guarantees your free sport if you watch it via broadcast TV, not if you stream it over the internet. This is a problem, because we all know TV viewing is changing and more and more Aussies don't have access to an aerial or choose to watch their favourite sports through apps like 7plus.

So, is your right to watch iconic sporting events for free under threat?

In short, yes. The Australian Parliament is currently considering a new Bill, which only guarantees free sports for Australians that have an aerial. It does not guarantee you will get free sport if you choose to stream it over the internet or don't have an aerial. So, if you have no aerial there is no guarantee that you will have access to free sport in the future.

As the Bill is drafted now, there is nothing stopping Amazon, Kayo, Prime and Netflix from buying all the digital rights to your favourite sports and making you pay if you want to stream your sport over the internet.

The Bill is called the Communications Legislation Amendment (Prominence and Anti-Siphoning) Bill 2023 and we need the Government to amend the Bill to include the free digital stream alongside the free broadcast stream so that all Australians can access free sport, regardless of whether they have a TV aerial or not.

What is anti-siphoning and why does it matter?

Anti-siphoning is a regulatory framework that protects the free and universal access for Australians to watch certain sporting events on TV. It works by creating a list of events that are deemed to be of national or cultural significance and requires these events to be offered to free-to-air broadcasters first before they can be sold to pay TV.

The anti-siphoning list ensures that all Australians, regardless of their income, location, or technology, can enjoy watching these events for free. It also supports the development and promotion of Australian sport, culture, and identity, by giving exposure and recognition to our local teams and athletes.

What are the problems with the Bill?

The Bill proposes to make some changes to the anti-siphoning list that have failed to appreciate the evolving digital media landscape and its effects on how Australians access their favourite sporting events. Around 20% of people currently view their favourite sporting events via the internet, and this is expected to grow to around 50% by the end of the decade.

The following changes are needed to ensure that the Australian right of free access to sport is protected:

- The anti-siphoning list will only require free-to-air broadcasters to be offered aerial-delivered broadcast rights to events on the anti-siphoning list. However, Australians are increasingly accessing their free TV services over the internet, especially younger viewers and those in new housing developments that don't have any aerials at all. The Bill does not protect the rights of Australians who access their TV services over the internet to watch their sporting events for free.
- Changes need to be made to ensure that both the free broadcast and free digital streaming rights are available to broadcasters before the event can be snatched up by a pay TV or subscription streaming provider. This would ensure that all Australians, regardless of how they access their TV services, can watch these events for free.
- The Bill proposes to automatically delist events from the anti-siphoning list 12 months before they take place. This could create a loophole for pay TV and subscription streaming providers to acquire the rights to these events before they are offered to free-to-air broadcasters, or to bid up the price of the rights and make them unaffordable for platforms that could show these events for free. Free access to some of our favourite sporting events will be lost altogether, which is exactly what happened when Amazon Prime acquired the exclusive rights for the ICC World Cup Cricket – meaning that we can no longer access free coverage for the World Cup Cricket at all.

What can you do to help?

If you care about your right to watch your favourite sporting events for free, you can help by signing up at [Free For Everyone](#) to show your support.

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