Case Study

# Blueback.

## How remote connectivity helped Blueback bring WA's stunning coastline to the big screen.

Mia Wasikowska as Abby and
Liz Alexander as Older Dora
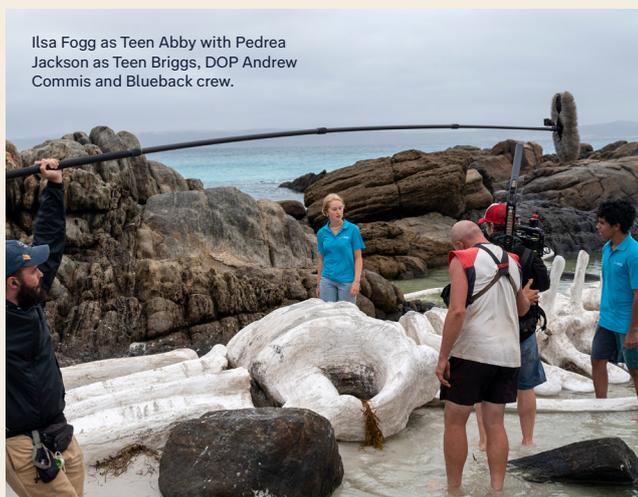with DOP Andrew Commis.

# Getting connected in Bremer Bay.

The Australian film industry is a unique tapestry of incredible people and inspirational storytelling. Australian filmmakers have been at the forefront of some of the industry's most creative and inspirational projects, shot in some of the most awe-inspiring locations on the planet.

From the rustic outback plains featured in The Adventures of Priscilla, Queen of the Desert, to the charismatic suburban charm of The Castle, Australian filmmakers have beautifully captured some of our nation's most iconic locations. Blueback — an adaptation of Tim Winton's superb short novel of the same name — is yet another example of how regional Australia shines on film.

Blueback follows the story of a young girl named Abby, who befriends a magnificent wild blue grouper whilst diving and must fight against poachers to protect it. The film was shot in Bremer Bay, a pristine coastal hamlet in WA's Great Southern Region, which is surrounded by white, sandy beaches and crystal-clear water.

Bremer Bay was the perfect site, but production teams faced a core challenge that often stops films from being shot in Australia's distinctive remote locations; robust connectivity. Modern filmmaking requires steady and strong network access, with a range of data-heavy requirements that ensure teams are connected and have access to the resources they require.

This challenge often prevents filmmakers from tapping into the unique beauty of Australia's remote landscapes, meaning productions must either shift to capital cities or other regions that aren't creatively appropriate.


Director Robert Connolly.


Ilsa Fogg as Teen Abby with Pedrea Jackson as Teen Briggs, DOP Andrew Commis and Blueback crew.

Determined to take advantage of Bremer Bay's stunning natural ecosystem, production company Arenamedia collaborated with Telstra to design and implement a technology and network solution to support the project's large-scale and highly complex needs.

The result sets a benchmark for connecting productions in regional areas, opening up new and exciting opportunities for regional and remote filmmakers. It also provides a platform for regional communities to share their stories and culture, paving the way for wider diversity within Australian film and television.

Bremer Bay's captivating natural environment extraordinarily captures Blueback's fictional Longboat Bay township, but the region has limited connectivity options. The town has a small mobile network infrastructure footprint, servicing a local population of just 373 people.

This posed a core challenge for Arenamedia. Modern filmmaking requires reliable and extensive data transmission, supported by a globally connected network. This enables distributors, investors, broadcasters and remote crew members (including post-production teams) to maintain open lines of communication and access the data they need.

# Building a strategic network solution.

All departments of a production have significant tech and data needs. Information must be reliably and rapidly shared between teams, as well as external parties such as agents, actors, media and a vast number of remote interstate and international stakeholders.

Reliable infrastructure is critical for the transmission of rushes (the footage shot each day), which is sent to production teams in Australia and around the world daily, allowing key production activities to take place within acceptable timeframes. A large volume of network capacity was also needed for the day-to-day administration of filming.

With several set locations across Bremer Bay, limited coverage made these essential tasks very difficult. An integrated communications solution was essential.

As the experts in regional connectivity, Arenamedia engaged Telstra as trusted advisors to help fulfill Blueback's network requirements.

Telstra conducted a full analysis of the location, with a comprehensive audit of the roles, responsibilities, activities and challenges faced within every department to scope Blueback's technical needs. After reviewing these needs against Bremer Bay's existing mobile network capacity, Telstra mapped out a technical solution to fully support all aspects of the production process.

Telstra maximised the connectivity available to production teams by providing access to high-speed uplink and downlink data capabilities from the existing Telstra mobile network. Telstra advised Arenamedia to use a combination of Netgear Nighthawk portable 4GX modems and Netgear Orbi stationary 4GX WiFi modems - coupled with external antennas - to boost access to internet infrastructure.

When installed in line with Telstra's recommendations, these devices satisfied Blueback's demanding data bandwidth requirements. It also allowed the cast and crew to access Wi-Fi calling, even if their individual service provider didn't have coverage in the area. Telstra also outlined the optimal timeframes to upload rushes based on maximum network availability, outlining how Bremer Bay's holiday peak periods would impact capacity.

> "Telstra's technology and expertise made a big difference to our operations and allowed the whole production to run smoothly. The support provided by Telstra was so well received on the ground".
>
> **Bec Bignell, Associate Producer**



Native Dog Beach, Bremer Bay.

# A front door for the film and TV industry.

With Telstra's support, Arenamedia was able to shoot Blueback entirely onsite and never missed a beat when it came to transmitting rushes and managing technical requirements.

It enabled all production staff to stay connected and manage day-to-day activities, ensuring timelines and budgets were met, despite onsite teams being physically separated by large distances. Once onsite, the connectivity also allowed crews to stay connected with their families, so they didn't feel isolated while on location.

Even before production started, greater connectivity across regional Australia was assisting Blueback to identify new talent, with over 1000 video applications received for lead roles. The democratic casting process was accessible to people from the most remote parts of Australia, who could audition from their living rooms from places where they may not have ordinarily been discovered.

The final production is a visual marvel, featuring amazing depictions of Bremer Bay's striking natural beauty. The success of the project opens the door for more productions to take place in regional Australia where connectivity may previously have been a deterrent.

Straight after production on Blueback wrapped up, Arenamedia engaged Telstra to execute a similar consultation for another production called Sweet As. Shot in Port Hedland and Karijini National Park, Telstra's expert advice ensured that the connectivity needs for Sweet As were seamlessly achieved, with recommendations on all required equipment to maximise network access.

These two projects demonstrate that regional productions can take advantage of the same tech and data capabilities that are available in capital cities. With the potential to build bespoke regional network and technology solutions, Telstra connectivity means filmmakers can bring their inspiring regional productions to life and contribute to an exciting new wave of Australian storytelling.

**To learn more about how Telstra opens the "front door" to regional Australian filmmaking with fast and reliable connectivity, get in touch with the Telstra Broadcast Services team at**

✉ **TBSproduction@team.Telstra.com**