

— A Justice Centre Report —

— March 23, 2026

Mission creep: Is it time to abolish the CRTC?

How a federal regulator controls
what Canadians share, discover,
and consume online

Author: Nigel Hannaford



Justice Centre
for Constitutional Freedoms

We Defend
Freedom
in Canada

Abstract

The Canadian Radio-television and Telecommunications Commission (CRTC) was intended to regulate broadcasting and safeguard Canadian culture against U.S. dominance, by mandating Canadian content and administering licenses. Its role was later enlarged to add telecommunications, cable regulation, and regulation of the internet. The CRTC, however, has become inefficient and has begun to function as a censorship arm of the government. This report argues that the CRTC is outdated, unnecessary, and should be abolished. Core licensing could be shifted elsewhere, while dismantling its regulatory superstructure would go a long way toward dismantling Canada's bloated machinery of propaganda and censorship. Abolition would unleash a dynamic, market-driven digital sector, one that respects authentic choice and freedom of expression.

Copyright and reprinting

Copyright © 2026 Justice Centre for Constitutional Freedoms.

Licensed under the Creative Commons [CC BY-NC-ND](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/4.0/). This license enables reusers to copy and distribute the material in any medium or format in unadapted form only, for noncommercial purposes only, and only so long as attribution is given to the creator.



Acknowledgements

We thank the thousands of Canadians who continue to support the Justice Centre with their donations. Their generosity empowers the Justice Centre to defend freedom in Canada and to shape public policy that respects *Charter* rights and freedoms.

Updates to this report

This is Version 1.0 of this report, which may be updated periodically.

About the author

This report was written by veteran journalist and public policy analyst Nigel Hannaford.

Contents

Abstract	2
Executive summary	4
Introduction	6
CRTC’s power expands rapidly over last decade	7
The CRTC’s original narrow purpose and responsibilities	7
The CRTC’s role massively expands	7
The CRTC as part of a federal ambition to control what Canadians see	9
Do Canadians need a cultural guardian?	10
Playboy vs Christian TV: A case study of politically biased regulations	12
A business case for abolishing the CRTC	13
1. The CRTC protects incumbents (e.g., Telus, Rogers, and Bell) more than consumers	14
2. The CRTC distorts and over-regulates the market	14
3. The CRTC is inefficient, secretive, and slow	16
Conclusion	17
Bibliography	19



Executive summary

The Canadian Radio-television and Telecommunications Commission (CRTC) was created in 1968 to regulate Canada’s emerging radio and television technologies. Originally, its mandate was narrow: administer radio and TV broadcasting licenses, and promote a distinct national culture by ensuring that at least 30 percent of content was “Canadian.”²

Over time, the CRTC’s mandate expanded telecommunications; phone companies within federal jurisdiction were added in 1975, and cable pricing and channel priorities in the 1980s.³



Terrasses de la Chaudière, the headquarters of the CRTC¹

While the CRTC already considered the internet within its purview when it emerged in the 1990s, Canadian internet regulation became a priority for the new government in 2015. Following a government-appointed internet review panel urging greater control of the internet, Bill C-11 (*Online Streaming Act*, 2023) brought streaming services (e.g., Netflix, Spotify, YouTube – including individual YouTubers and musicians) under CRTC regulation, allowing it to manipulate algorithms to make the government’s preferred content more “discoverable.”⁴ These powers allow the government to secretly control the reach of published content and Canadians’ access to it, making the CRTC an ideal institution for promoting government priorities and effectively censoring undesired views.

Then, Bill C-18 (*Online News Act*, 2023), brought the news industry under CRTC regulation, with the stated goal of supporting Canadian news businesses by having intermediaries (e.g., Google and Meta’s Facebook and Instagram) pay news outlets for links. In response, Meta banned links to Canadian news, resulting in substantial readership and revenue

¹ Photo from Wikipedia: Canadian Radio-television and Telecommunications Commission. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Canadian_Radio-television_and_Telecommunications_Commission

² Since January 1971, AM broadcasters have had a mandate to devote a minimum of 30% of their daily music airtime to Canadian content.

CRTC. “Public Notice CRTC 1990-20.” Government of Canada. February 16, 1990. <https://web.crtc.gc.ca/eng/archive/1990/PB90-20.htm>

³ In 1975 the CRTC Act also assigned to the CRTC responsibility for the regulation of the activities of telecommunications companies (eg, telephone companies) within federal jurisdiction. Canadian Encyclopedia.

⁴ Discoverability refers to how easy it is to find Internet content; discoverability for any given content comes at the expense of what it displaces and is a form of information suppression, if not outright censorship.

losses for the news industry, with small independent publishers hit especially hard.⁵ Further, while Google agreed to a \$100 million annual payout, the government determines who qualifies – based on the “Canadian-ness” and “true journalism” of content – effectively picking its winners and losers.

As a consequence, the government now has longer levers to shape the national conversation in real time. It has turned the CRTC into a gatekeeper who decides which ideas, creators, and stories get amplified, or quietly suppressed — not by banning them outright, but by making them harder to find. It does not trust Canadians to choose for themselves what they watch or listen to.

But Canadians do not need a government body to decide what content they should discover, consume, or create, as if we need a “cultural guardian.” Indeed, this represents a classical form of social control through the modern public square, threatening Canadians’ freedom of expression, access to information, and genuine choice online.

There are also economic issues. The CRTC protects existing broadcasters (e.g., Bell, Rogers, Telus) over consumers, as its policies reduce competition, investment, and innovation in the market, thereby limiting consumer choice and increasing costs. The CRTC is also inefficient, secretive, and slow, with fewer public hearings, more private lobbyist meetings, and declining productivity despite almost doubling staff by 2025–26 since its early days.

Considering all this, there is only one possible conclusion: the CRTC must be abolished. Canadians do not need an unaccountable bureaucracy shaping what they can share, access, and consume, and the basic regulatory necessities could well be placed elsewhere. Abolishing the CRTC would affirm a simple but important principle: governments should not act as gatekeepers of expression or curators of information.

⁵ Canadians travelling outside Canada [can still access Canadian news via Facebook](#); The ban only operates within Canada. So powerful was Facebook in distributing Canadian news within the country, and so great the readership slump when it stopped distributing news, that former *Calgary Herald* publisher and later CRTC commissioner Peter Menzies wryly observed that the Canadian newspaper industry demanding Internet platforms pay for content had the same effect as ‘charging paperboys for the privilege of distributing the newspaper.’

Introduction

What should be done with a government bureaucracy whose mandate has become outdated, that distorts markets, and that encroaches on citizens' freedoms without accountability?

At some point, its existence must be re-evaluated. For the CRTC, that moment has arrived.

It is, after all, one thing for the federal government to pursue its dream of a distinctively Canadian culture - the original and stated purpose of the CRTC when it was established in 1968. It is quite another to repurpose it as an instrument of social control.

Recently passed legislation (like Bill C-11 and Bill C-18) and additional bills now before Parliament (like C-2, C-8, C-9, and C-22) betray the federal government's ambition to censor expression in Canada and limit Canadians' access to information.

The use of the CRTC to control access to foreign content has never been consistent with *Charter* values such as freedom of information. However, this latest legislation brings fresh urgency to the long-dormant question of whether Canada really needs a federal broadcasting bureaucracy. Could the entire superstructure of regulations that limit both Canadians' choices and their ability to freely publish on the internet be dispensed with, while its basic and necessary functions of administering licences be distributed elsewhere?

This report argues that it could – and should.

This report reviews the CRTC's original purpose, analyses its mission creep over time, and reveals how it now encroaches on Canadians' freedom of expression, access to information, and capacity for genuine choice online. Further, it reexamines the business case for the CRTC, highlighting how it distorts the media and broadcasting market, protecting existing businesses at the expense of new ones, and ultimately, consumers. For these reasons, this report concludes that the CRTC must be abolished.

CRTC's power expands rapidly over last decade

The CRTC's original narrow purpose and responsibilities

The CRTC⁶ was established in 1968 as the Canadian Radio and Television Commission. Initially, it had two purposes.

Its first purpose was to regulate both the privately owned and public elements of the Canadian broadcasting system. This included granting and renewing licenses to radio and TV stations and establishing regulations and policies to define their activities.

Second, faced as Canadians were with the attractive juggernaut of America's entertainment industry, it was to be the nation's cultural guardian.

In those early days, its mandate to protect Canadian culture was narrow and meant fairly obvious priorities, such as full coast-to-coast radio and television coverage (primarily provided by the CBC – both radio and television.) After 1971, the CRTC would establish rules governing how much Canadian content radio – and later television stations – should offer. The requirement was that 30 percent of broadcast music was “Canadian,” according to the CRTC's sometimes tricky⁷ definition of national origin.



Image with an old radio and a TV station (from Adobe, by by Khorzhevskya)

The CRTC's role massively expands

Since its inception in 1968, the CRTC's role has been expanded and redefined several times.⁸ In 1975, its priorities grew to include telecommunications companies (e.g., Bell, Rogers, and Telus). In the 1980s, the pricing of cable TV services and channel offerings was

⁶ Government of Canada, CRTC. Canadian Radio-television and Telecommunications Commission. <https://crtc.gc.ca/eng/home-accueil.htm>. Retrieved, March 12, 2026.

⁷ Blake, Austin. “CRTC's New Canadian Content Rules Spark Outrage: Critics Say It's a Joke.” 2025. <https://www.iphoneincanada.ca/2025/11/18/crtcs-new-canadian-content-rules-spark-outrage-critics-say-its-a-joke/>

⁸ Those requiring an extensive summary of the history of the CRTC, are referred to the [Forum for Research and Policy in Communications](#).

added (with priority given to Canadian signals), all codified later in the 1991 *Broadcasting Act*.

Then came the internet.

When the World Wide Web (WWW) was launched in 1989,⁹ the CRTC stated that it considered audio and video content delivered over the internet to be within its administrative purview. However, the CRTC took a “wait-and-see” attitude and did not attempt to regulate this new phenomenon as it took shape.¹⁰ Streaming services like Netflix and Spotify arrived around 2011, disrupting the CRTC’s hitherto regulatory monopoly on cable and broadcasting services. These US-based platforms delivered content online without borders, drawing hundreds of thousands of Canadian viewers away from regulated cable/broadcasting systems, while generating no revenue for Canadian content creation.

The Conservatives under Stephen Harper (2006-2015) favoured minimal internet intervention, believing that governments should adapt to the open, free internet rather than regulate it.¹¹

Internet regulation became a priority for the new government, elected in 2015. Its legislative review led to the January 2020 panel report *Canada's Communications Future: Time to Act*.¹² This report urged urgency in reimagining the CRTC as a proactive, forward-looking regulator – emphasizing expanded responsibilities for the digital age, including online platforms, cultural diversity, and stronger Canadian media/content support.

The resulting laws and policies handed the CRTC new regulatory powers with which to regulate the internet and to control what content Canadians produced, published, and accessed online.

The first new law was Bill C-10, introduced in 2020. It died with the 2021 election and was re-introduced as Bill C-11, the *Online Streaming Act*, which passed into law in 2023. This brought streaming services (e.g., Netflix, YouTube, and Spotify) under CRTC regulation,

⁹ CERN. “Sir Tim Berners-Lee submitted his first proposal for what became the World Wide Web.” March 1989. <https://timeline.web.cern.ch/timeline-header/90>

¹⁰ Notably, [Broadcasting Public Notice CRTC 1999-84](#).

¹¹ MacLean’s. “Governments must adapt to Internet, not other way around.” August 12, 2011. <https://macleans.ca/society/technology/governments-must-adapt-to-internet-not-other-way-around/>

¹² Broadcasting and Telecommunications Legislative Review Panel. “Canada's communications future: Time to act.” Government of Canada. January 2020. <https://ised-isde.canada.ca/site/broadcasting-telecommunications-legislative-review/en/canadas-communications-future-time-act>

allowing the CRTC to make Canadian content more “discoverable,”¹⁴ to tax streaming services, and to divert the money to sponsoring original “Canadian” content. The bill also brought individual users and content creators under CRTC regulation, allowing it to manipulate algorithms to make the government’s preferred content more discoverable, while reducing discoverability of undesirable or “un-Canadian” content.



Icons of online streaming services on a TV display. Image by City News Everywhere.¹³

The second law was Bill C-18, the *Online News Act*, which brought the news industry under CRTC regulation. It became law in 2023, with the stated goal of supporting independent “Canadian” news businesses by having news intermediaries (e.g., Google and Meta’s Facebook and Instagram) pay news outlets for links. This proved to be a catastrophic failure: Both Google and Meta cancelled all pre-existing contracts, values in the millions. Meta then banned the sharing of all news links, which slashed traffic (by up to 70 percent in some cases) to numerous media outlets in Canada. Small, independent news publishers were hit hardest.¹⁵ While Google ultimately agreed to pay an annual \$100 million lump sum, it ultimately does not make up for the revenue lost by the news industry as a result of Bill C-18.¹⁶ Worse yet, as with its existing subsidies to the news industry, the government retained the authority to determine who qualifies – based on the “Canadian-ness” and “true journalism” of content – effectively picking its winners and losers.

The CRTC as part of a federal ambition to control what Canadians see

Other legislation currently under consideration in Parliament (C-2, C-8, C-9 and C-22) brings the internet under further government regulation, revealing the government’s strong commitment to control what Canadians see, hear, read and say online.

Bill C-8, if passed, would give the CRTC more power to “promote the security of Canadian telecommunications,” which could include regulation against broadly defined “security threats” of individuals of interest.

¹³ City News Everywhere, “Streaming giants required to contribute to Canadian content as Bill C-11 passes.” <https://toronto.citynews.ca/2023/04/27/streaming-giants-canadian-content-bill-c-11/>

¹⁴ Discoverability refers to how easy it is to find internet content; discoverability for any given content comes at the expense of what it displaces and is a form of information suppression, if not outright censorship.

¹⁵ Klassen, Benjamin. “Canada’s *Online News Act*: A disaster for freedom of expression.” Justice Centre for Constitutional Freedoms. March 18, 2024. <https://www.jccf.ca/reports-12/>

¹⁶ Ibid.

Other bills like the failed Bill C-36, which in 2021 sought to create powerful new censorship and enforcement bodies and to remove subjectively defined “harmful” content from the internet,¹⁷ and the failed Bill C-63 (*Online Harms Act*)¹⁸ with similar proposals, were equally troubling. While the CRTC would have had little direct role in their administration, these Bills illustrate how comprehensive the government’s efforts were to control what Canadians see, hear and say to each other, regardless of *Charter* protections for freedoms of expression and the right to access information. The tenor of the legislation before Parliament referred to above, suggests that nothing has changed.

Overall, the CRTC's gradual yet massive mandate expansion – from traditional broadcasting to broad regulation of the internet – exemplifies a classic example of "mission creep," where an agency incrementally takes on tasks far beyond its original purpose, akin to bureaucratic overreach in *Yes Minister*.¹⁹

Calls to merely reform the CRTC are insufficient. An institution that, from its inception, was empowered to regulate Canadian content – however well-intentioned – cannot simply be adjusted at the margins. Reform would produce only temporary restraint before the agency once again expands its reach and reasserts itself as a cultural gatekeeper and censorship bureaucracy that imposes its view of the “good” on Canadians.

Do Canadians need a cultural guardian?

The merits of a bureaucracy devoted to forcing Canadians to listen by default to ostensibly “homegrown” cultural products have been debated for as long as the CRTC has existed.

One can understand the good intentions of protecting and promoting Canadian culture. However, granting government power to regulate and promote “Canadian” content rests on a faulty premise, that Canadians need a cultural guardian. It assumes that Canadians agree about what constitutes a distinct “Canadian” culture, that government can be trusted to discern correctly what this culture is, and that even Canadian adults need state protection from “foreign” (meaning American) ideas, viewpoints, and cultural products.

The premise that a government body should determine or influence what content is available, promoted, or restricted is paternalistic and incompatible with freedom. This

¹⁷ Carpay, John. “Online Hate Censorship Bill Will Do More Harm Than Good.” *Western Standard*, October 19, 2023. <https://www.jccf.ca/online-hate-censorship-bill-will-do-more-harm-than-good/>.

¹⁸ Government of Canada. *The Online Harms Act*. Bill C-63. House of Commons. First reading. 2023. <https://www.parl.ca/DocumentViewer/en/44-1/bill/C-63/first-reading>

¹⁹ *Yes Minister* is a 1980s British political satire sitcom.

approach treats citizens as cultural wards of the state rather than as rational individuals capable of choosing for themselves.

One of the most insidious and effective ways to restrict freedom is to dress up censorship as benign, ordinary and routine administration. However, promoting some content while limiting access to other content is still censorial, even when conducted through licensing schemes and discoverability mandates. The best way to protect freedom is not by depending on the goodwill of the government, but by placing firm limits on state power.

Of course, the influence US entertainment industry was and is very powerful. However, its power came from its attractiveness. Its appeal was worldwide, not just in Canada. The idea that Canadians ought to be forced to listen to – and pay for – what other Canadians produced purely because it was Canadian-made, is simply not acceptable.

It is, of course, beyond the scope of this paper to pass judgment on the quality of “Canadiana” endorsed by the CRTC in the 1970s.

Canadians have different opinions about what qualifies as “Canadian” music, art, and literature. Is something “Canadian” because it was written, painted or composed by a Canadian? Or is a song or book “Canadian” because of its contents? Or perhaps it needs both: to be created by a Canadian and also have a “Canadian” theme or subject? What about Canadian artists who become successful in the US market – is their content no longer “Canadian” simply because they no longer live and work in Canada? (See examples in footnote.)²⁰ When governments use their coercive powers (through federal regulation) to settle these debates, this necessarily creates winners and losers among content creators, who can no longer compete culturally or economically on a level playing field.

And, when such luminaries of Canadian content as Margaret Atwood (a Canadian author of many popular books, including *The Handmaid’s Tale* series) cast doubt upon the moral certainty of mandated Canadian content – “It is creeping totalitarianism if governments are telling creators what to create”²¹ – it must surely be time to reconsider the whole idea.

²⁰ Examples of Canadian artists living and working in the US include actors like Michael J. Fox, Keanu Reeves and Ryan Gosling, musicians like Drake, Joni Mitchell, and Bryan Adams, and comedians like Jim Carrey and Russel Peters, among many others. Rachel Cavanaugh lists a more comprehensive list:

Cavanaugh, Rachel. “30 Celebrities You Might Not Know Are Canadian.” *Newsweek*. Jan 26, 2021. <https://www.newsweek.com/30-celebrities-you-might-not-know-are-canadian-1564271>

²¹ Isen, Tajja. “Is CanCon Obsolete?” *The Walrus*. June 6, 2023. <https://thewalrus.ca/is-cancon-obsolete/>

Playboy vs Christian TV: A case study of politically biased regulations

Those who would defend the CRTC's role in determining what Canadians watch and listen to must also explain what looks like blatant bias in the CRTC's rejections of applications for Christian radio stations.

For example, in July 1997, the CRTC approved the distribution of *Playboy TV*, along with *The Golf Channel* and *Game Show Network*, yet simultaneously rejected three small American religious networks and the large, widely supported Eternal Word Television Network (EWTN.) The latter was personally endorsed by ten Canadian bishops, had vigorous backing from the 225,000-member Knights of Columbus, and was supported by more than 4,000 individual letters, yet it was denied.

At the time, the Commission was easing its earlier embargo on independent religious broadcasting but still imposed strict conditions: single-faith channels were permitted only on cable, and applicants had to demonstrate “balanced programming”²² that included multi-faith perspectives on matters of public concern.

The stated reasons – non-compliance, lack of balance, spectrum scarcity, or failure to demonstrate market need – appear selectively applied. *Playboy TV* was allowed despite its explicit adult content and narrow focus, while Christian applicants face repeated demands for “balance” that secular or mainstream broadcasters rarely encounter to the same degree.

The requirement for religious stations to provide multi-faith viewpoints on public issues is a standard²³ not imposed on other niche broadcasters (e.g., sports, music, or ethnic channels). When combined with the CRTC’s approval of *Playboy TV* in 1997 while vetoing EWTN, the record suggests an ideological preference: explicit adult content is deemed acceptable for discretionary distribution, but religious programming – particularly evangelical or Catholic – faces higher barriers, stricter scrutiny, and frequent denials.

These examples are illustrative, but not exhaustive. Other examples include restrictions on French-language Christian AM station in Montréal,²⁴ the Ernest Turcotte Evangelistic

²² CRTC, “Public Notice CRTC 1993-78.” Government of Canada. June 03, 1993.

https://crtc.gc.ca/eng/archive/1993/pb93-78.htm#The_Issue_of_Balance

²³ Ibid.

²⁴ CRTC. “Broadcasting Decision CRTC 2006-83.” Government of Canada. March 15, 2006.

<https://crtc.gc.ca/eng/archive/2006/db2006-83.pdf>

Association (2007)²⁵ and Faithway Communications Inc., whose radio station CJRI-FM was denied renewal (2023).^{26, 27}

Those who defend the CRTC as a neutral cultural guardian must reconcile this apparent double standard. If the Commission's mandate is truly to promote diversity of voices and serve the public interest, why does it appear more permissive toward certain forms of adult entertainment than toward faith-based broadcasters that enjoy substantial community support?

The inconsistency supports the serious questions raised above about impartiality and whether the CRTC has long exercised a form of selective social control over what Canadians are permitted to hear on the airwaves.

A business case for abolishing the CRTC

While the Justice Centre's contention with the CRTC is primarily focused on how it negatively impacts Canadians' rights and freedoms, we are also sensitive to how the CRTC negatively impacts free market values, including fairness, competitiveness, and low costs for consumers.

Informed industry watchers challenge the worth of the CRTC's much-expanded regulation of Canada's broadcasting industry,²⁸ in at least the following three areas:

1. The CRTC protects incumbents (e.g., Telus, Rogers, and Bell) more than consumers
2. The CRTC distorts and over-regulates the market
3. The CRTC is inefficient and bureaucratic, too slow in decision-making

Here we examine each of these.

²⁵ CRTC. "Broadcasting Decision CRTC 2007-412." Government of Canada. December 05, 2007. <https://crtc.gc.ca/eng/archive/2007/db2007-412.pdf>

²⁶ CRTC. "Broadcasting Decision CRTC 2023-246." Government of Canada. August 08, 2023. <https://crtc.gc.ca/eng/archive/2023/2023-246.htm>

²⁷ Although this denial was said to be for non-compliance, critics contrast this with renewals of secular stations despite compliance issues.

²⁸ And roundly condemned by users. In the new age of internet streaming, the CRTC's mandate is outdated. Canadians may support CanCon in theory, but in practice, they want free access to content streamed over the Internet, as shown by what they access.

1. The CRTC protects incumbents (e.g., Telus, Rogers, and Bell) more than consumers

In its bid to “manage competition,” the CRTC ends up creating barriers to efficient market entry and contestability (see footnote),²⁹ while imposing obligations that incumbents (e.g., Telus, Rogers, and Bell) must absorb – or, in practice, pass along to consumers. This shields incumbents from full market pressures – such as foreign takeovers, aggressive domestic rivalry, or technological disruption – while costs are shifted to consumers through higher prices, slower innovation, and reduced choice.

The CRTC’s protection of incumbents manifests in several ways. Foreign ownership restrictions cap foreign control at low levels, preventing efficient foreign entry or acquisitions that could challenge incumbents and force lower prices. Mandated wholesale access requires incumbents to share their infrastructure (fibre and mobile networks) with competitors, reducing incentives for costly upgrades to their infrastructure, since competitors can “piggyback” on it. In broadcasting, content subsidy requirements and rules insulate traditional Canadian TV and media companies from competition from US companies or online streaming services. Ultimately, consumers suffer from higher prices (e.g., elevated mobile rates), delayed innovation (slower 5G rollouts), and limited content options.³⁰

2. The CRTC distorts and over-regulates the market

Established in a pre-digital age, the CRTC imposed burdensome rules designed for a limited number of broadcasters. These rules now extend to a vast array of online streaming services (e.g., Netflix, YouTube, Spotify), which bear little resemblance to traditional broadcasters. In the process, these rules also distort competition and hamper innovation in both broadcasting (e.g., TV, radio) and telecommunications (e.g., Wi-Fi/internet, phone, cellphone).

For example, CRTC rules require traditional large Canadian broadcasters to devote a significant share of their programming budgets and airtime to “Canadian” content. English-language broadcasters must contribute approximately 30 percent of revenues to “Canadian” programming. This means that if a broadcaster earns \$1 billion in

²⁹ “Contestability” refers to the degree to which a market can be entered and exited by new firms without significant barriers. It emphasizes the idea that even if a market is currently dominated by a few firms, the threat of potential competition can influence the behavior of existing firms, leading to more competitive pricing and innovation. This concept is closely related to the idea of barriers to entry, which are obstacles that prevent new competitors from easily entering an industry or area of business.

³⁰ Those with an appetite for a more detailed examination of how CRTC regulation affects competition in broadcasting, are referred to the work of the Fraser Institute’s Steven Globerman. [He offers evidence that such “managed” policies lead to decreased network investment and higher costs](#), contrasting with true deregulation that would enhance contestability.

broadcasting revenue, roughly \$300 million must be directed to Canadian programming expenditures, regardless of audience demand or commercial viability.

Further, since 2020, policy makers have, through the CRTC, sought to extend similar obligations to online streaming platforms, with Bill C-11, the *Online Streaming Act*, in force since 2023. Since 2024, the CRTC has required major online streaming services³¹ with more than \$25 million in Canadian revenue to pay a five percent levy³² to support Canadian content and news production.

Payments are expected to total about \$200 million annually for Canadian cultural production, to be distributed to the Canada Media Fund for Canadian programming (2 percent), the Independent Local News Fund (1.5 percent), and funds supporting “diversity and accessibility” (1 percent).³³

These measures are intended to support domestic cultural production, but they reduce competition and distort market incentives where content is being produced for which there is little consumer demand or commercial viability. One could hardly have clearer cases of capital allocation mandated by regulation, rather than market preference.

And of course, the costs flow through to consumers, affecting subscription prices. Analysts estimate that a 5 percent streaming levy, if fully passed on to subscribers as expected, would increase Canadian household streaming costs by an average of roughly \$40 per year.³⁴

In other words, regulatory compliance costs are ultimately borne by consumers. Global platforms like (e.g., Netflix, YouTube, Spotify) may be required to direct a portion of their revenues toward certified “Canadian” productions regardless of whether those projects match consumer demand. This is a self-fulfilling prophecy of sorts: If a particular genre needs subsidies to exist, that’s probably because there’s little natural demand for it.

³¹ Netflix, Spotify, Amazon Prime Video, Apple TV etc

³² CRTC. “Broadcasting Regulatory Policy CRTC 2024-121.” Government of Canada. June 4, 2024. <https://crtc.gc.ca/eng/archive/2024/2024-121.htm>

³³ The Changing Narratives Fund gave \$940,000 to support “workforce development, training, and leadership pathways for diverse creators.” This includes a workforce development program offering paid job placements for black film producers, and an indigenous-led virtual production training program addressing gaps in access to immersive media training and equipment. [Source: Canada Media Fund \(February 19, 2026\)](#). The CMF also handed nearly [\\$2.5 million to 17 projects](#) led by equity-deserving communities for mentorship, training, and professional development.

³⁴ Zhang, Lawrence. “The Online Streaming Act Will Cost Canadians.” Information Technology & Innovation Foundation (ITIF). January 14, 2025. <https://itif.org/publications/2025/01/14/online-streaming-act-will-cost-canadians>

According to some analysts,³⁵ this approach effectively compels companies to prioritize regulatory compliance rather than audience preference. When firms must allocate capital to meet quotas or levy payments, they have fewer resources available to experiment with new formats, technologies, or services. The added compliance costs may also be reflected in higher subscription prices for consumers.

3. The CRTC is inefficient, secretive, and slow

Bureaucracies, by their very nature, tend to be risk-averse and slow. There was no reason to suppose that the CRTC would be an exception, but critics have recently backed up this general assertion with a comprehensive study.

Characterised by the *Forum for Research and Policy in Communications* as “secretive and slow,”³⁶ the CRTC appears to have been doing less with more, for some years.

The *Forum* – “a non-partisan organization focused on research and policy about Canada’s communications system”³⁷ – asserts that there are fewer and fewer hearings the public can actually attend, “from dozens in the 1980s to a handful in the last decade.” At the same time, the CRTC is entertaining more private meetings with lobbyists than ever before (an average of 44 per year in the same period),³⁸ “which it says raises concerns about whose interests are being heard.”³⁹

As for slowness, it further reports that in its first 20 years, the CRTC issued “nearly 31,000 decisions with an average staff of 380 people (some 80 decisions per staff person).” From 2005-2024, however, “the commission issued just 12,000 decisions, with an average staff of 460 full-time or equivalent persons, or roughly 27 decisions per staff person.” For this fiscal year, the CRTC Departmental Plan “indicates a contingent of 717 full-time or equivalent staff, a 56 percent increase over the 2005-24 average.”

The *Forum* is hardly alone in its critique. The *Canadian Association of Broadcasters* has repeatedly criticized the CRTC for bureaucratic delays and outdated processes. Their letters to the regulator argue that the CRTC’s systems are slow, duplicative, and costly,

³⁵ Globerman, Steven. “Netflix becomes more Canadian—but you’ll pay for it.” October 04, 2017. Fraser Institute. <https://www.fraserinstitute.org/commentary/netflix-becomes-more-canadian-youll-pay-it>

³⁶ Ibid.

³⁷ Forum for Research and Policy in Communications (FRPC). “The CRTC’s performance, 1969 – 2025: Analysis and recommendations.” August 2025. <https://frpc.net/wp-content/uploads/2025/08/CRTC-Performance-August-2025.pdf>

³⁸ Ibid.

³⁹ Ibid.

especially for smaller radio and TV stations.⁴⁰ Key complaints^{41, 42} are that ownership approvals can take eight to 18 months, and that the CRTC's administrative systems have been barely modernized since 2004.

Meanwhile, there have been several concrete instances where Parliament (or the Cabinet) effectively rebuked the CRTC, usually for policy errors, lack of transparency, or slow/controversial decisions, either through House Committee hearing criticisms, or by Cabinet Orders-in-Council referring CRTC decision back for reconsideration.⁴³

Conclusion

With the CRTC's mission creep in recent years, now regulating Canadians' expression and streaming online, it has become clear that it is time to abolish this unaccountable bureaucracy. Abolishing the CRTC and repealing Bills C-11 and C-18 that empower the CRTC to regulate online content, is now an essential step to protect online free expression for Canadians, and their freedom to choose the content they want.

Given that the federal government evidently wishes to use the CRTC to supplement its larger goals of monitoring and controlling expression in Canada, the reality is that abolishing this shaky old bureaucracy would not achieve everything that free speech advocates would wish for. After all, with the CRTC gone, the government could perhaps turn to other departments to accomplish some of its censorship objectives.

Nevertheless, the CRTC is an entire government department dedicated to the regulation of content Canadians consume, initially just radio and TV, but now the internet as well. Abolishing it is an important first step.

The business case is equally strong. Why should governments, rather than a free market, regulate technical implementation, competition, or user protection?

⁴⁰ Blake, Austin. "CRTC Buries Broadcasters in Endless Reports—Here's the Absurd List." iPhone in Canada. November 17, 2025. <https://www.iphoneincanada.ca/2025/11/17/crtc-buries-broadcasters-in-endless-reports-heres-the-absurd-list/>

⁴¹ Howard Law. "To broadcasters' dismay, CRTC's radio consultation doesn't budge on airplay quotas." MediaPolicy.ca. March 13, 2025. <https://mediapolicy.ca/2025/03/13/to-broadcasters-dismay-crtcs-radio-consultation-doesnt-budge-on-airplay-quotas/>

⁴² Ibid.

⁴³ Government of Canada. Innovation, Science and Economic Development Canada. "Order Referring Telecom Decision CRTC 2023-358 Back to the CRTC." <https://www.canada.ca/en/innovation-science-economic-development/news/2024/11/order-referring-telecom-decision-crtc-2023-358-back-to-the-crtc.html?utm>. Retrieved, March 12, 2026.

These can be managed through contracts, voluntary associations, and market incentives, with courts enforcing property rights and adjudicating disputes. It is not axiomatic that complex systems need bureaucratic regulation; in a globalized digital economy, market forces – such as consumer choice and competition between multiple providers – could ensure diversity and quality naturally, without a centralized government regulator. Abolishing the CRTC would eliminate these distortions, promoting a more dynamic sector where innovation thrives unencumbered by outdated oversight.

The case for abolishing the CRTC is clear: its over-regulation distorts markets, its mandate is outdated for the era of streaming movies and other content over the Internet, it threatens free expression, it limits content options for consumers, it slows innovation, and it protects incumbents at consumers' expense. Any of its functions that are potentially truly necessary, like licensing, could be handed off to other government agencies.

While reform might theoretically address biases or overreach, abolition is simpler, more effective, and more durable long-term.

Policymakers should act to prevent further entrenchment of this obsolete institution, seeking to abolish it, and repeal bills like Bill C-11 and C-18, which subject the internet and broadcasting more generally to government regulation. They must also oppose all legislation with the same objective currently under consideration, like Bills C-2, C-8, C-9, and C-22.

Canadians must also do their part. Canadians should stay informed and contact their elected officials, demanding that they support abolishing the CRTC, that they vote to repeal Bills C-11 and C-18, and that they protect an open and free internet, which respects their freedom of expression and online choice of content.

Bibliography

- Blake, Austin. "CRTC Buries Broadcasters in Endless Reports—Here's the Absurd List." iPhone in Canada. November 17, 2025. <https://www.iphoneincanada.ca/2025/11/17/crtc-buries-broadcasters-in-endless-reports-heres-the-absurd-list/>
- Blake, Austin. "CRTC's New Canadian Content Rules Spark Outrage: Critics Say It's a Joke." 2025. <https://www.iphoneincanada.ca/2025/11/18/crtcs-new-canadian-content-rules-spark-outrage-critics-say-its-a-joke/>
- Broadcasting and Telecommunications Legislative Review Panel. "Canada's communications future: Time to act." Government of Canada. January 2020. <https://ised-isde.canada.ca/site/broadcasting-telecommunications-legislative-review/en/canadas-communications-future-time-act>
- Canada's Forum for Research and Policy in Communications. <https://frpc.net/about-us/>
- Cavanaugh, Rachel. "30 Celebrities You Might Not Know Are Canadian." Newsweek. Jan 26, 2021. <https://www.newsweek.com/30-celebrities-you-might-not-know-are-canadian-1564271>
- CERN. "Sir Tim Berners-Lee submitted his first proposal for what became the World Wide Web." March 1989. <https://timeline.web.cern.ch/timeline-header/90>
- CRTC, "Public Notice CRTC 1993-78." Government of Canada. June 03, 1993. https://crtc.gc.ca/eng/archive/1993/pb93-78.htm#The_Issue_of_Balance
- CRTC. "Broadcasting Decision CRTC 2006-83." Government of Canada. March 15, 2006. <https://crtc.gc.ca/eng/archive/2006/db2006-83.pdf>
- CRTC. "Broadcasting Decision CRTC 2007-412." Government of Canada. December 05, 2007. <https://crtc.gc.ca/eng/archive/2007/db2007-412.pdf>
- CRTC. "Broadcasting Decision CRTC 2023-246." Government of Canada. August 08, 2023. <https://crtc.gc.ca/eng/archive/2023/2023-246.htm>
- Davis, Abby. "Streaming Services Usage Statistics in Canada." Made in CA. January 25, 2026. <https://madeinca.ca/streaming-services-usage-statistics-canada/>
- Department of Justice Canada. "Bill C-11: An Act to amend the Broadcasting Act and to make related and consequential amendments to other Acts." https://www.justice.gc.ca/eng/csj-sjc/pl/charter-charte/c11_2.html. Retrieved, March 12, 2026.
- Department of Justice Canada. "Charter Statement: Bill C-10." Ottawa: Government of Canada. <https://www.justice.gc.ca/eng/csj-sjc/pl/charter-charte/c10.html>.
- Fereg, Gamiela. "Poll finds majority of Canadians want Canadian culture protected in the face of US threats." Canadian Media Producers Association. October 6, 2025. <https://cmpa.ca/pressreleases/poll-finds-majority-of-canadians-want-canadian-culture-protected-in-the-face-of-u-s-threats/>
- Forum for Research and Policy in Communications (FRPC). "The CRTC's performance, 1969 – 2025: Analysis and recommendations." August 2025. <https://frpc.net/wp-content/uploads/2025/08/CRTC-Performance-August-2025.pdf>

- Globerman, Steven. "CRTC at a crossroads." National Newswatch. June 02, 2016. <https://www.fraserinstitute.org/commentary/crtc-crossroads>
- Globerman, Steven. "Promoting Efficient Competition in Canadian Telecommunications and Broadcasting." Fraser Institute. 2025. <https://www.fraserinstitute.org/sites/default/files/2025-08/promoting-efficient-competition-in-cdn-telecommunications-and-broadcasting.pdf>
- Globerman, Steven. "Netflix becomes more Canadian—but you'll pay for it." October 04, 2017. Fraser Institute. <https://www.fraserinstitute.org/commentary/netflix-becomes-more-canadian-youll-pay-it>
- Government of Canada, CRTC. Canadian Radio-television and Telecommunications Commission. <https://crtc.gc.ca/eng/home-accueil.htm>. Retrieved, March 12, 2026.
- Government of Canada. "Broadcasting and Telecommunications Legislative Review." <https://ised-isde.canada.ca/site/broadcasting-telecommunications-legislative-review/en>. Retrieved, March 12, 2026.
- Government of Canada. "Canada's communications future: Time to act." January 2020. [https://ised-isde-canada.ca/site/broadcasting-telecommunications-legislative-review/en/canadas-communications-future-time-act](https://ised-isde.canada.ca/site/broadcasting-telecommunications-legislative-review/en/canadas-communications-future-time-act)
- Government of Canada. "Order Issuing a Direction to the CRTC on a Renewed Approach to Telecommunications Policy." <https://ised-isde.canada.ca/site/mobile-plans/en/order-issuing-direction-crtc-renewed-approach-telecommunications-policy>. Retrieved, March 12, 2026.
- Government of Canada. Innovation, Science and Economic Development Canada. "Order Referring Telecom Decision CRTC 2023-358 Back to the CRTC." <https://www.canada.ca/en/innovation-science-economic-development/news/2024/11/order-referring-telecom-decision-crtc-2023-358-back-to-the-crtc.html?utm>. Retrieved, March 12, 2026.
- Howard Law. "CRTC shakes up CanCon rules." MediaPolicy.ca. November 18, 2025. <https://mediapolicy.ca/2025/11/18/crtc-shakes-up-cancon-rules/>
- Howard Law. "To broadcasters' dismay, CRTC's radio consultation doesn't budge on airplay quotas." MediaPolicy.ca. March 13, 2025. <https://mediapolicy.ca/2025/03/13/to-broadcasters-dismay-crtcs-radio-consultation-doesnt-budge-on-airplay-quotas/>
- <https://cybercultural.com/p/internet-2011/>
- Interaction Design Foundation. "What is Discoverability?" IxDF—Interaction Design Foundation. June 3, 2016. <https://www.interaction-design.org/literature/topics/discoverability>.
- Isen, Tajja. "Is CanCon Obsolete?" The Walrus. June 6, 2023. <https://thewalrus.ca/is-cancon-obsolete/>
- Maclean's. "Governments must adapt to Internet, not other way around." August 12, 2011. Maclean's, Inc. <https://macleans.ca/society/technology/governments-must-adapt-to-internet-not-other-way-around/>
- MacManus, Richard. "What the Internet Was Like in 2011." Cybercultural. January 10, 2025.
- Openparliament.ca. "Bill C-11 (Historical)." Session, which ended in January 2025. <https://openparliament.ca/bills/44-1/C-11/>
-

The Canadian Independent. "CRTC data reveals CBC's audience slumped to 3.9percent in 2021-2022, marking a 50percent decline since 2013." [The Canadian Independent](https://thecanadianindependent.substack.com/p/crtc-data-reveals-cbcs-audience-slumped). Sep 26, 2023.
<https://thecanadianindependent.substack.com/p/crtc-data-reveals-cbcs-audience-slumped>

Touch Media. "Media Consumption in Canada: CMUST 2024 Overview." Touch Media. April 24, 2025.
<https://www.touchemedia.com/en/perspectives/media-consumption-in-canada-cmust-2024-overview/>

Wikipedia. "*Survival: A Thematic Guide to Canadian Literature*." https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Survival:_A_Thematic_Guide_to_Canadian_Literature. Retrieved, March 12, 2026.

Wikipedia. "Canadian Radio-television and Telecommunications Commission." https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Canadian_Radio_television_and_Telecommunications_Commission. Retrieved, March 12, 2026.

Wikipedia. "Yes Minister." https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Yes_Minister. Retrieved, March 12, 2026.

Zhang, Lawrence. "The Online Streaming Act Will Cost Canadians." Information Technology & Innovation Foundation (ITIF). January 14, 2025. <https://itif.org/publications/2025/01/14/online-streaming-act-will-cost-canadians>

