



29th September 2008

**Ministerial Statement of Expectations
Screen Australia Statement of Intent**

The Australian Film Institute thanks Screen Australia and the Minister for the opportunity to comment on Screen Australia's draft Statement of Intent.

The AFI strongly supports the functions outlined in the Screen Australia Act 2008, which are to:

- Support and promote the development of a highly creative, innovative and commercially sustainable Australian screen production industry; and
- Support or engage in the development, production, promotion and distribution of Australian programs and the provision of access to Australian programs and other programs; and
- Support and promote the development of screen culture in Australia

The AFI submits that Screen Australia's Statement of Intent should state that Screen Australia will support and work with existing organisations to expand their programs to support the Minister's Statement of Expectations.

connecting the screen industry and the public

The core aim of the AFI is to develop an active screen culture in Australia by fostering engagement between the general public and the screen industry, and by promoting Australian film and television.

The AFI facilitates a number of screen culture programs each year to promote Australian film and television production. The most notable of these is the annual AFI Awards, which acknowledge excellence across 44 film and television categories and provide an important showcase for each year's work. The AFI Awards ceremony has been broadcast nationally on a commercial network since 2005, promoting a very broad slate of film and television programs and the practitioners who create them.

The annual AFI Awards Screenings, which form part of the judging and voting process for the AFI Awards each year, sees all entered feature films and nominated non-feature films presented to AFI members and general public alike across seven capital cities. For both filmmakers (who are invited to introduce their films) and audiences, the AFI Awards Screenings provide an important and often rare, opportunity to converge.

In addition to these event-based programs, over the past three years the AFI has developed, via philanthropic and commercial partners, a professional development program that will provide \$100,000 of support to industry performers and practitioners in 2008.

Screen culture remains foundational for the AFI. We believe that the many national programs aimed at development and production can only succeed if we can create and build audiences for Australian content.

Since 2005, the AFI has rebuilt the AFI Awards, our "night of nights", in recognition of the criticality of the Awards as a program that promotes the industry. The AFI Awards are the only national, commercially broadcast showcase of each year's productions, cast and crew. It is a significant achievement to secure a national broadcast with a commercial network, 2008 marks the fourth consecutive commercial broadcast of the AFI Awards. The number of productions entered into the AFI Awards continues to grow, and entries in all film and television categories are at or near record levels. For the more than 2000 industry members who attend across the two nights, the

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AFI Awards also provide an important opportunity to network and celebrate their achievements at the end of each calendar year.

Due largely to the increased reach of the commercial broadcast, the profile of the AFI Awards continues to grow. The event has evolved materially over the past four years through the engagement of corporate partners who provide the bulk of the event funding.

The AFI Awards broadcast, and the national profiling of our industry they allow, enhances box office and DVD sales, cultural awareness, local screen industry recognition, and the international brand of the Australian industry. As seen in other international markets, all successful national screen industries grow their national Awards schemes (eg Oscars, BAFTA) to promote their products, supported of course by local exhibitors and distributors.

Placed squarely between the practitioners and the public, the AFI performs a role unlike any other organisation in the country.

2008 marks a powerful milestone for the Institute – its 50th Anniversary. This year, the AFI celebrates 50 years of the AFI Awards, a history of critically important tradition and the promotion of screen culture in Australia. The AFI brand has few rivals in terms of longevity or engagement within the cultural industries, a notion that is captured in the thought that “anyone who is anyone in Australia’s screen industry, in front of or behind a camera, has been associated with the AFI.”

In 2008, in response to shifts in the global industry and feedback from industry stakeholders, the AFI has again moved to put greater support behind critical parts of our industry, independent and innovative feature filmmakers, and documentary makers.

Technology is helping to drive an emerging, more independent and innovative filmmaking sector that is now blossoming. Almost half of the feature films entered in this years AFI Awards have been produced independently of federal or state government support or investment, and a similar number have been made for less than a million dollars (i.e. would be ineligible for the Producer Offset). Whilst some of these films do not yield the higher levels of production values typically associated with higher budget

features, they nevertheless display the commitment, authenticity, meaning and emotion of their Australian makers.

The AFI has been able to bring publicity, limited national distribution and of course the chance for peer assessed critical appraisal to such independent films. Many of these films would not otherwise have the opportunity for any theatrical exhibition in most capital cities and hence the possibility for discovery, for both filmmakers and audiences, would have been severely limited.

These innovative enterprises need support, and the AFI Awards, and the national AFI Awards Screenings, in addition to the AFI's other programs, go some way toward providing this. The AFI aims to support practitioners at each end of the career spectrum, and has a strong focus on developing these emerging, innovative filmmakers. Some of them will be audience-builders, locally and internationally, in the future.

Similarly, the AFI has implemented a new global initiative for documentary filmmakers. The winner of the 2008 Best Documentary AFI Award will become the inaugural AFI Documentary Trailblazer. Support includes travel to Cannes in April 2009 where their work will be showcased at the MIPDOC Trailblazer conference. This initiative raises the profile of Australian documentary making in the largest global marketplace, augmenting opportunities for international sales, collaborations and co-productions.

Development support, funded by commercial and philanthropic partners, will reach \$100k in 2008 alone. AFI Fellowships continue. Inaugurated in 2007, these are becoming very sought after. Nick Barkla, successful last year, has strongly advanced a number of very interesting projects in the short time elapsed since receipt of this opportunity. The L'Oreal Paris AFI Young Actor of 2007, Kodi Smit-McPhee, has had his career really accelerated. Macquarie Bank began supporting AFI Screenplay Awards last year (won by Tony Ayres).

Audience development, nurtured across 50 years, remains a core objective of the AFI.

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The AFI, with a growing online promotional infrastructure, partnered with a commercial national broadcaster and extensive coverage in print media, is well positioned to cultivate audiences. This year we have completely upgraded to an online membership management and communications system, incorporating a new website, enhanced e-news capabilities and online voting.

Additional resources for a greater outreach program would allow current programs to be extended to have a greater impact on a range of important audience segments, particularly the next generation of audiences.

Federal support is imperative in order for the AFI to continue building its screen culture programs nationally. As the AFC has previously acknowledged, Federal support in particular will ensure that the Awards process (calls for entry, reviewing and judging, nominations, media and publicity) can be administered with integrity.

There are also opportunities to get more impact from the AFI's programs, in particular, our national commercial broadcasts, national screenings programs, online promotional architecture and professional development programs. Whilst established to support particular objectives, these are dynamic platforms that could be extended to sustain a multiplicity of purposes.

Membership remains fundamental to the AFI and even in these more difficult times (particularly for Australian theatrical content), the AFI has been able to maintain thousands of general and professional members.

An exclusive industry membership was negotiated with the industry Guilds and initiated this year to enable their members and other professionals more access to participation in AFI programs as part of AFI strategy to facilitate greater interaction between Australian audiences on the one hand and Australian filmmakers and their Guilds on the other.

The next few years appear likely to deliver higher profile screen productions. We hope to be able to seize and lever this opportunity further expand membership and audiences for Australian screen content, and to work with Screen Australia to support its programs.

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We would like to see Screen Australia state in its Statement of Intent that it will encourage and support existing organisations (like the AFI, the professional Guilds & bodies and Australian film festivals, all of whom have already built significant screen industry Brand capital), to expand their programs to support the Minister's Statement of Expectations.

We look forward to assisting Screen Australia deliver strongly on the stated objectives, reinvigorating relations between the screen industry and the public, both at home and abroad.

We seek an opportunity in the near future to discuss the AFI's role, strategy and relevance, as we believe the AFI is perfectly positioned to assist Screen Australia deliver these exciting and necessary outcomes.

Yours Sincerely,



Damian Trehwella
General Manager

