



australian | screen | editors

Response to Screen Australia Statement of Intent

30th September 2008

by the
Australian Cinematographers Society
Australian Guild of Screen Composers
Australian Screen Editors
Australian Screen Sound Guild
(hereinafter called “the Guilds”)

The Guilds that have compiled this response are peak Australian industry bodies representing over 2500 industry professionals.

We encourage and support the development of a diverse and sustainable film & television industry and creative sector and, in broad terms, we support the introduction of the Producer Offset and many of the changes proposed by Screen Australia in its Statement of Intent. In particular, we support and encourage the apparent key shift from highly prescriptive funding rounds to results-based funding, and from one-off funding for projects to funding of viable private sector enterprises based on track record and future plans.

Overall, our strongest response to Screen Australia’s SOI, and our strongest recommendation for creating a more sustainable industry, is for a substantial shift from funding within Government to funding beyond Government, from in-house to outsourcing – including training, screen culture events, professional advice and assessments and, of course, production.

Key Recommendations

MINIMUM BUREAUCRACY

A much higher proportion of government funding must reach the industry it is intending to assist than has occurred in the past. To be effective and of most benefit, a minimum target should be set.

GREATER ROLE FOR INDUSTRY

The industry guilds and the private sector should be given greater responsibility to do what government agencies have, in some cases, tried to do in the past – from making films to running screen culture or training events to assessing new projects. We believe that the private sector and the guilds can generally accomplish these with greater efficiency and greater sensitivity to the market and to the community.

FUNDING FOR INDUSTRY GUILDS

Peak industry bodies should receive direct financial support from Screen Australia, with limited acquittal requirements, determined by some equitable means such as matching subscription income dollar for dollar. These guilds have arisen through democratic processes and can provide high value per dollar of investment.

INDUSTRY CONSULTATION

The Guilds propose that Screen Australia should go well beyond any basic level of industry consultation with all peak industry bodies. Even this has been notably lacking in the past, particularly in the development of plans for Screen Australia. We are proposing that industry guilds should be key partners with Screen Australia at all decision-making levels.

SIMPLE ACQUITTALS

The results accomplished by the industry, whether they be completed productions or successful training or screen culture events, should become the primary form of acquittal of government funding. Paperwork requirements should be kept to a minimum, allowing more time to be spent on productive outcomes.

LESS PRESCRIPTIVE FUNDING

Prescriptive funding, determined by a government agency, should be avoided as much as possible. Decisions based on creative judgments should also not be made solely within a government agency, and projects should certainly never be in the position of being rejected by a single individual. Most importantly, creative decisions should be left to the filmmakers.

INDUSTRY TRAINING

In this industry, as in many, the best and most cost-effective training is often on the job; it often also leads directly to ongoing employment. There should be a shift in funding (as well as in mindset) from government training to industry training initiatives, and non-governmental organisations (whether private sector companies or guilds) should be given financial incentives to develop training programs and to provide apprenticeships.

BENEFITS FOR ALL

Members of the Guilds represented here may not benefit directly or immediately from the Producer Offset, most do not receive ongoing revenue from productions (or any form of “back-end split”), and none have the clout of the union- or monopoly-style structures that exist in other countries or markets.

As the industry adjusts to the Producer Offset, there is likely to be a period or time lag where producers are able to build up their position and strength within the industry, but where the benefits of the offset are not passed on to all members of a production team. Screen Australia should ensure that minimum industry standard conditions and wages are applied in all budgets it oversees.

FUNDING FOR AUSTRALIANS

Government funding, whether direct or via the Producer Offset, should seek to maximise the number of Australians that benefit from it and to encourage producers to employ Australians. Payments to non-Australian creative personnel, including composers, cinematographers, editors and sound crew, should not be included in QAPE. The Government should also put in place measures to ensure that funding provided to the sector, via Screen Australia, free-to-air broadcasters, and other agencies is directed towards Australian productions and filmmakers.

WHOLE OF AUSTRALIA

More attention (and funding) must be focussed on regional Australia, possibly through a broadening or replication of schemes currently in place for indigenous filmmakers. Current funding, despite being federal, favours Sydney and a few other capital cities and it accentuates the disincentives for setting up a film-making enterprises outside a few capital cities, even though such enterprises can be economically viable.

WHOLE OF GOVERNMENT APPROACH

Screen Australia should take on a much broader mantle than its predecessors. The film and television industry is not just about providing a direct economic return, nor is it purely about “culture”; this industry has a unique and extraordinary range of benefits to Australia, including major benefits to each of the following portfolios: Tourism, Environment, Aboriginal Affairs, Health, Education (especially early childhood education) and many more. Unless Screen Australia oversees all policies and government funding

to this sector, there will inevitably continue to be great inefficiencies, duplication, competition between government and the private sector, tenders allocated by departments without appropriate technical expertise and, perhaps most importantly, the value of this sector will continue to be grossly underestimated.

Background

Australian Cinematographers Society

The ACS is Australia's peak organisation for cinematographers, with over 1200 members and an active branch in every State and Territory. Founded 50 years ago, it looks after the interests of cinematographers, recognizing excellence through its awards and internationally-recognised accreditation, conducting workshops, training and screenings throughout the country, keeping members informed about the industry and changing technology through a quarterly magazine and regular newsletters, and providing professional and social networking opportunities.

Australian Guild of Screen Composers

The AGSC represents the interests of Australian screen composers in television, film and multi-media through developing and promoting employment opportunities, undertaking educational initiatives and increasing their profile amongst the industry.

Australian Screen Editors Guild

The ASE is a cultural, professional and educational organisation, dedicated to the pursuit and recognition of excellence in the arts, sciences and technology of motion picture film and televisual post production. The Guild aims to promote, improve and protect the role of editor as an essential and significant contributor to all screen productions.

ASE was formed in 1996 and has nearly 300 members in all states, although most members are in NSW and Victoria. The Guild is an association of professional screen editors and assistants working in a wide range of disciplines.

Australian Screen Sound Guild

The Australian Screen Sound Guild represents the profession of screen sound in film, television, multimedia and other related audio industries within Australia. It aims to recognise, maintain and promote original and creative work, to encourage high standards and to facilitate study and research into the knowledge, techniques and technology of screen sound production.

Through its equal membership of AFFTA (The Australian Federation of Film and Television Associations) it is also able to represent its members at Government level.

This report has been compiled through consultation between the Guilds. We must express some concern about the timescale provided for the industry, and for volunteer organisations in particular, to respond to a document that seeks to do nothing less than guide the future of our entire industry. We are also concerned that Screen Australia appears to be continuing with internal reforms independently of any consultative process. We trust that Screen Australia will fully consider both the broader and the more specific recommendations of this submission prior to establishing its new operations and we look forward to working closely with Screen Australia to accomplish this.