

## **Lesley Hammond – comments on Screen Australia’s draft SOI**

I have a problem with some of the language used in the Draft Statement of Intent. Based on our experience, it is at odds with the Producer Offset Guidelines in fundamental areas.

1. The Draft Statement of Intent - 1. Background quotes the 'Screen Australia Act 2008 functions as".....highly creative, innovative and commercially sustainable Australian screen production industry....." and "Support and promote the development of screen culture in Australia". This is not borne out in the Guidelines, Eligible Film formats where a feature film is defined as being the main attraction in commercial cinemas. For large-format projects such as IMAX etc.

This effectively defines a feature film by the architecture of the building in which it is screened.

We have had discussions with the FFC earlier this year when a project we have made for large screen VENUES was not deemed to be eligible for the offset because it wasn't in a CINEMA. We've developed a new genre for wildlife films which is an extension of the old silent movies where a piano or music ensemble including sometimes symphony sized orchestras performed live with the screening of the film. What we've done is to have the music written so that the particular wildlife species' 'sound' is utilized as a musical instrument 'performing' with a live symphony orchestra. It enables us to have a greater flexibility with the sound which is mixed live at each performance and according to the acoustics of the particular venue which varies according to the size and distribution of the audience. It also gives the sound component of film more prominence in the final production. We were told by the FFC that we weren't eligible for the offset because it's not performed in a cinema. The architectural design of modern cinemas results in their not having enough room for a symphony orchestra to perform live. We therefore have to screen the film in other styles of venues. With this definition of what is a 'film', the entire history of film is changed. Wipe out Charlie Chaplin and his films most of them wouldn't qualify, ditto Buster Keaton, ditto the original 'Ben Hur', 'Napoleon' and countless others. By this limited view of FILM, films didn't exist until the talkies!

This isn't developing a screen culture in Australia, only SOME screens. By this limitation of what is a film, perhaps the very name of Screen Australia is a misnomer!

2. Still on the definition of a feature film. Our production is comprised of various musical works which make up the whole. As per Walt Disney's 'Fantasia'. Our production runs for approx. 90 mins. The

fundamental difference with ours and Walt Disney's is that our images are live not animation. According to the FFC this meant our project is a documentary and we would therefore only be eligible for a 20% producer offset. An absurd definition. VERY limited thinking! Walt Disney would have been relieved that he'd made 'Fantasia' in animation otherwise he would have been classified in Australia as a documentary maker!

3. In view of our experience in trying to do something a bit innovative which is also commercially sustainable, we haven't found the experience to be at all encouraging to innovation! Obviously you can only be innovative in Australia if you develop something that can be performed in a building which is architecturally built as a cinema! Perhaps Screen Australia could look at the definition of the word 'innovative' if it is going to use it as a criteria.

4. Can we live in hope? Will Screen Australia have some less blinkered thinking than the old FFC committee that came up with the above position/s? Hopefully you have some people with new thinking and attitudes. It is needed if indeed we are to have a SCREEN CULTURE as distinct from a CINEMA CULTURE!

On documentaries, the minimum QAPE figures is ludicrous. Clearly whoever decided this figure is not au fait with current prices paid worldwide for 95% of documentaries. It is unrealistic and puts producers in the position of putting up budgets to achieve it and which then won't get their money back for the investors. It's got a very familiar ring to it..... but then I DO remember the old 150% tax days and its successors.....

I would welcome discussion with Screen Australia on any or all of the above. Blind Freddie (oh god is it Freddie Mac.....there's no hope...) can see that as a small independent filmmaker in Australia I feel very pissed off.

Sincerely,  
Lesley Hammond