



# SCREEN DEVELOPMENT AUSTRALIA

## Response to

# SCREEN AUSTRALIA

# STATEMENT OF INTENT

Tuesday, 30 September 2008



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## SDA OVERVIEW RESPONSE to DRAFT SOI

SDA welcomes Screen Australia's policy direction to focus on building a viable and sustainable industry through respect for and engagement with market dynamics. We applaud many elements including its enterprise development programs for companies, its decision to re-integrate "new media" into the mainstream, its support for documentary and children's content, its intention to partner more closely with the State agencies, and new initiatives including the reward bonus for features.



However, it is noticeably muted on the matter of development in terms of either product or enterprise for the early to mid-career independent sector, and silent on its representative national body SDA.



Therefore, we propose the following Recommendation, and provide its supporting rationale.

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## RECOMMENDATION

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As the representative body of the early to mid-career independent sector, the site of the future major players of the Australian screen industry, SDA recommends the following:

***The SDA network be recognized and named within the SOI as a critical, integral component of the new industry building landscape, and integrated into primary policy as such.***

This be done on the following basis:

- SDA is the ideal mechanism for rolling out new government policy nationally and for responding rapidly to change.
- SDA is the key post-educational, pre-industry filter point for production companies
- SDA is the central mechanism for the development of the riskier new talent and product
- SDA represents and services the independent sector, the source of the major players of the future industry, and bridges them into the industry itself.
- In economic terms alone, SDA is a highly cost-effective, strategically valuable system.

The draft of the proposed insertion into the SOI reads:

***“The SDA national network of screen development centres is recognized as a critical, integral component of the new industry building landscape, and a key partner in this task.”***

## RATIONALE

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One of the keys for a sustainable industry is the fostering of talent. Not recognizing talent and letting it fall away will always work to the detriment of our national screen industry. The industry development models in Australia have devolved into a ‘first time only’ model because of the lack of identifiable career pathways, sustainable over the long term, which can allow practise to grow and develop. To change this involves taking risks with talent and product and taking time with professional development.

The screen industry is a chain of development and production from ultra-low budget right through to high-budget product. Given the lack of commercial capacity because of our small home market, the significant majority of production in Australia over any one year is low or ultra-low budget. This is the sector of the early-career independents, where filmmakers also invest their own time and money in advancing their careers and gaining market traction. Given the rapidly increasing content needs of all distribution mediums, much of this product is usable, and some even potentially profitable for a distributor. In short, low-budget independent production is a significant component of the Australian industry, bridging filmmakers from the community and the education & training industries into the screen industry. SDA represents and services this sector, and provides the bridge.

In relation to the development and production of low-budget product across platforms the SDA centres have jointly developed a significant level of expertise and intellectual capital that is both nationally focused and firmly grounded in local and regional conditions. Government investment in growing this expertise would be most strategically exploited by systematically incorporating SDA into the centre of the industry-building process, making use of its joint expertise, its highly cost-effective methods, and its large national network. The SDA centres are perfectly placed to industrialise and professionalise the process while also monitoring quality of product. Because, as non-profit organisations, they are not driven by profit imperatives, they are able to allow for experimentation and the right and need to fail.

In the course of its work SDA also provides for the balance between the growth of the industry and cultural objectives called for by the Minister in his SOE. We do this by encouraging development and production of local content, often to meet express community needs, while also providing development opportunities for early-career industry professionals. This aspect of SDA work comes into sharp focus in the range of ground-breaking Indigenous developmental programs undertaken by the centres.

The SDA national alliance of screen development centres develops and harnesses talent through providing highly cost-effective opportunities for producing early low-budget work within processes designed to simulate professional production practice, and enhanced by short term, responsive training and accredited courses. Through this, the SDA centres, while quarantining government and the industry from risk, identify the outstanding screen practitioners in order to facilitate them into further production opportunities with the production companies, and into contract opportunities in the industry itself.

SDA filters the many to find the few. This is one of the key functions that make SDA critical to the development of the screen industry in Australia. This role, complimented by resulting career path opportunities in private companies, provides the screen industry with a vital ingredient for success.

#### **BACKGROUND: SCREEN DEVELOPMENT AUSTRALIA**

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SDA is the national network of 6 screen development centres (SDA's) - independent non-profit companies or associations supported by a mix of state and federal (SA) funding, and their own entrepreneurial activities. SDA holds the most extensive "alumni" network in the industry. A significant number of industry leaders have a career history with the SDA's.

The SDA network is a unique, national, multi-purpose, industry-building system:

- Established in 6 states, firmly grounded in the regions, and networked nationally
- Deliverers of national objectives through programs at a regional level, with local knowledge
- Equipped for production
- Professionals in development and production of low-budget product
- Professionals in industrially focused, skills-based training, both pre- and post-educational
- Providers of a decentralised but integrated research & development function for industry and government that develops and supports production of innovative, risky product and platforms
- Highly regarded by industry and community alike
- Standard reference and consultation point for industry and government nationally in the search for new talent, product and developmental concepts
- Providers of the primary national first-point advisory service for the industry
- Providers of the primary national first-stage filtering of talent and product for the industry
- Embedded in national industry networks & partnerships
- Highly productive and cost-effective
- National system for sharing of IP, systems, methodologies and networks
- Significant capacity for rapid, innovative, focused industrial response
- Deeply committed to the core SDA task of building a successful, globally competitive screen industry in Australia

Given the above, SDA is ideally and strategically positioned to service industry and to deliver on government policy, increasing its reach and its productivity.

## KEY EFFECTS & OUTCOMES OF SDA PROGRAMS AND ACTIVITIES

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- Facilitate early-career, independent content makers into achieving multiple competitive screenings and awards for SDA product in national and international film festivals, contracts with broadcasters, and a variety of forms of employment within the industry.
- Increased professionalization of the early-career, independent sector of the industry through leading it to become more commercially aware and entrepreneurial, and more strategic.
- SDA's are a highly-developed, first-stage, national filtering system for government, production companies and broadcasters, managing and filtering the continual national flow of trained and partially trained filmmakers through a range of development and production programs, identifying real talent and potential out of that flow. This enables the large number of film school graduates to be filtered on the pre-industry side.
- The SDA's stand as the bridge between the education & training sector, and the industry itself, developing untrained individuals so they can gain access to the industry or to higher qualifications in the tertiary sector, but also taking graduates from the tertiary sector, further developing their industrial, craft, creative and entrepreneurial skills, and assisting them directly into the industry through contracts and other opportunities.
- SDA's work directly within communities – regional, indigenous, youth, ageing and others – carrying out basic training and assisting directly with production. This enables the general community outside the industry to create digital content for television but also potentially for web- and mobile-distribution platforms, telling their stories. This contributes to quality of life in communities, but also contributes content to a content-poor international screen system. In this way the SDA's also spot new talent & new product for industry.
- Because they are highly flexible, and relatively small independent companies operating on a widely diverse business model, SDA's can respond rapidly to changing industry needs.
- Because the commercial and government sectors are highly risk-averse, the SDA's are the only system in place that can pursue risk and innovation in product to not only follow market taste in new ways, but also to lead market taste with new product forms, and simultaneously quarantine government and commerce from that risk, experimentation and failure. This in turn reveals that the SDA network is the natural provider of a key research and development function for industry.

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### **Presented by:**

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