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Date: 31/03/2011 06:05 PM
Subject: Small screen guidelines comment

Dear Screen Australia,

Following on from your request for comment on the small screen funding programs, please find attached my formal feedback.

Television funding is a highly commercialized production industry in Australia where the current industry is largely self-sustaining. There are not the hand-wringing debates about lack of viewers for original Australian content as there are in the film industry, and overseas sales are well-represented through existing relationships between local broadcasters and international distributors.

Given this positive state of the industry, there is no need for such significant financial support for TV drama production as described in the guidelines.

There is no urgent need that is being fulfilled with this level of commitment.

There is no crisis in the television industry in Australia.

There is no rapid industry growth or immediate opportunity that can be seized by the television industry with this high level of funding.

The Discussion Paper for the *2010 Review of the Australian Independent Screen Production Sector* produced by the Department of the Environment, Water, Heritage and The Arts in 2010 summarised the health of the industry as follows: "The total 2008-09 production slate comprised 38 features and 44 television drama programs (653 hours) shot in Australia, as well as nine foreign PDV-only projects. This compares to 45 features, 44 television drama programs (701 hours) and 15 foreign PDV-only projects in the previous year.

The Australian and co-production feature slate comprised 29 local and three co-production titles, accounting for expenditure in Australia of \$358 million, more than double the previous year's \$170 million and well above the five-year average of \$194 million.

In-house drama activity by Australian broadcasters was similar to the previous year, with four series/serials by the Seven Network totaling 206 hours, compared to four in-house series/ serials and one telemovie (206 hours) in 2007-08. Children's television drama expenditure rose from \$69 million in 2007-08 to \$103 million"

In the original review document *Television Funding – A review of Screen Australia's Objectives*, the purpose is described as: "Screen Australia will undertake a review of its funding of television production in order to ensure Screen Australia's function of supporting Australian programming and the broader television production industry is being delivered in an optimum way."

This commentary proposes to **match the stated objectives by providing equal funding for TV drama and for digital interactive screen productions.**

Digital production is the fastest growing sector of media worldwide. Innovation is happening at a pace never before seen in any media sector. These innovations span the very top layers of graphical presentation, through core production technologies to the business models that support them.

With the increase in broadband speeds globally, we are no longer in the era of the cheap DVD-extras website. The rise of transmedia projects throughout the film and television sectors is increasing the height of the quality bar to a point where pure creative thought is not enough to compete on a global scale.

Australia is at a familiar set of crossroads. With the film and games industries, it has been here before with a single choice: Should Australia invest in its own intellectual property, or become a service industry for foreign productions and companies?

As with the film and games industries before it, digital industry production budgets are rising rapidly as audiences expect higher quality online on new multimedia tablets like the iPad.

Australia can choose to invest in these transmedia productions and build on the substantial creative recognition that has been achieved to date with international Emmy Awards, Webby Awards and export achievements, or can let foreign companies use Australia as a distribution outpost for their own intellectual property.

Screen Australia has planted valuable seeds of success with the Innovation Program. However maintaining this program is not enough to keep Australia on a front foot. Audiences and broadcasters are expecting more original content – both video and interactive – in their experiences.

Now is critical point in the growth of the digital media industry alongside traditional media production. Overseas we have seen the success of funds in Canada, Singapore and Abu Dhabi producing world-beating digital content that has created news jobs, new revenue streams and international respect for the funding bodies.


Now is the time where Screen Australia can decide whether it wants to create a viable digital media industry, and refresh the television production industry simultaneously.

The guidelines are the crossroads. If funding for the All Media sector is matched with the TV Drama, it will give Australia the chance to create a valuable, world-class and highly innovative industry for the future.

Not making this decision will create a legacy where Australians are lauded for the new lives they have created overseas, with the mediocre remaining at home.



“Winner – Production Company of the Year – Cross-Platform” – Encore Film Magazine Awards 2010

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