

MEDIA RELEASE

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SCREEN AUSTRALIA TO INCREASE DEVELOPMENT FUNDING BY 60%

Tuesday 9 December 2008: Screen Australia today released its 2009 Development and Production Financing Programs, following three months of industry consultation. The programs include a suite of new development initiatives that offer screen practitioners a range of pathways to develop their projects.

“The future of the Australian screen industry depends on the talent of its people and the quality of their projects,” **Ruth Harley**, Screen Australia Chief Executive Officer, said today. “We have rethought the way in which the industry and projects are supported by Screen Australia. We have also substantially increased funding for development.”

“Screen Australia has re-focused its activities by reducing the number of development strands from 35 to seven. We have also introduced the Enterprise Program, a major new initiative to provide multi-year funding to better resource production companies and enable them to develop a slate of projects rather than relying on single-project funding. In 2009/10, Screen Australia will spend more than \$10 million on development, which is nearly 60% more on a comparable basis than the Australian Film Commission (AFC). This fundamental philosophical shift will support practitioners to create outstanding screen content that resonates with audiences,” Dr Harley said.

In addition, Screen Australia is streamlining application processes and introducing quicker turnaround times for development funding applications, which will make it easier for practitioners to deal with the Australian Government’s screen agency.

Dr Harley added that Screen Australia’s analysis of development projects funded by the AFC indicates that when a producer is attached at an early stage of a project, there is a higher chance of that project being produced, and in a shorter timeframe. “To reflect this we have made significant changes to development funding to increase the likelihood of success,” she said.

Screen Australia’s Development Programs include:

- Enterprise Program, which provide funds to production companies with experienced principals who have identified opportunities to develop and expand their business and produce a slate of product;
- Single-project development programs for features and documentaries;
- Talent Escalator program, including practitioner labs, targeted initiatives and industry fellowships, for practitioners at all levels; and
- Innovation Program, focusing on digital media projects and projects that use innovative technology or form.

“Industry feedback has been invaluable in helping to shape these programs,” Dr Harley said. “The Talent Escalator program has been introduced to support practitioners to take the next step in developing their skills, career and projects and to support the renewal of the Australian screen industry. We are open to ways of funding short film production in association with State Government organisations and other partners.”

Screen Australia’s Enterprise Program will provide up to \$500,000 per year for a three-year period. A minimum of \$3 million will be spent on this program in the 2009/10 financial year, growing to an estimated \$5.5 million by 2011/12.

Screen Australia's Production Financing Programs will invest in a range of audience-engaging and culturally relevant screen content including feature films, short animation, documentary product, television drama and children's drama.

Screen Australia has allocated an indicative budget of \$60 million to the production financing area for 2009/10. This represents 73% of Screen Australia's total program budget of \$82 million. For 2009/10 Screen Australia's Federal Government appropriation has been reduced by \$9.5 million to \$93.5 million, reflecting an increased investment by the Government in the Producer Offset. With the introduction of the Producer Offset available funds to the screen industry have significantly increased.

Screen Australia also released guidelines for Indigenous Programs that provide development and production opportunities for projects initiated by Indigenous Australian screen practitioners. "We have allocated an additional indicative budget of \$4 million to Indigenous Programs, which is \$2.5 million more than was previously allocated. This increase in funding acknowledges the local and international success of many of the projects funded through the Indigenous Branch, as well as the unique stories being generated out of this program area," Dr Harley said.

Screen Australia's program guidelines can be downloaded from www.screenaustralia.gov.au/industry_support along with a covering letter from Ruth Harley, noting the key changes relative to the draft guidelines released in late October.

Revised Terms of Trade are also released today for two weeks of industry comment. Terms of Trade will take effect from 1 January 2009. Major changes include:

- the return of screen rights to producers for all future productions;
- requiring a copyright interest at the development stage only when Screen Australia's investment exceeds \$100k;
- rolling over development investment into production investment;
- overall lower production investment fees;
- a best endeavours obligation to ensure producers have a 35% recoupment entitlement in their production.

Screen Australia is giving further consideration to its position in relation to recoupment, particularly whether it should quit its recoupment entitlement after a certain number of years. Screen Australia anticipates putting a proposal on this issue to the industry in early 2009.

The Terms of Trade are available at www.screenaustralia.gov.au/terms Industry practitioners are invited to comment on the Terms of Trade until Monday 22 December 2008.

Screen Australia will now review its marketing function including its investment in Australian screen culture, as well as all mechanisms to support the delivery of its new programs.