



Australian Government



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DISCUSSION PAPER  
**DOCUMENTARY FUNDING:  
STORIES THAT MATTER**

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## How to contribute

Moderated discussions will take place in conjunction with the Australian International Documentary Conference (AIDC) in March 2014.

Following this, Screen Australia invites submissions focused on the questions set out on page 16, and encourages comment beyond these questions where relevant to the purpose of the discussion. Send to [feedback@screenaustralia.gov.au](mailto:feedback@screenaustralia.gov.au)

Written submissions will be accepted for up to four weeks following AIDC, ie until **4 April 2014**.

Submissions will be published on the Screen Australia website as they are received, unless we are advised otherwise.

[www.screenaustralia.gov.au/DocumentaryDiscussion](http://www.screenaustralia.gov.au/DocumentaryDiscussion)

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## Introduction

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Screen Australia supports documentary production with \$18-20 million of direct funding and around \$20 million each year through its administration of Producer Offset rebates. To complement the direct funding, the agency provides services, resources and advice to the documentary community through a wide range of initiatives, including enterprise funding and festival and international markets support. It also provides industry benchmarks through production and performance data, as well as sector development activities such as funding for domestic festivals and conferences, and masterclasses for practitioners. Screen Australia seeks to ensure that its programs reflect the contemporary needs of the industry, the market and documentary audiences.

Screen Australia held its first review of funding for television production in 2010 and, from this review, developed new guidelines for its documentary funding programs which took effect in July 2011. The review anticipated further refinement of the programs over time as the documentary landscape evolves for filmmakers, broadcasters and audiences alike.

We've already seen significant changes in the way we consume screen content. Television, over ever-increasing numbers of channels, continues to attract the largest audiences of all platforms. Today's television schedules for documentary tend to include larger volumes of lighter factual programming and repeat series, alongside proportionally lower levels of more intensively researched or authorial documentary forms, all complemented by dedicated online content. However, technology has also made it easier for audiences to engage beyond the television set, opening up opportunities for producers to create alternative viewing options for specialised audiences.

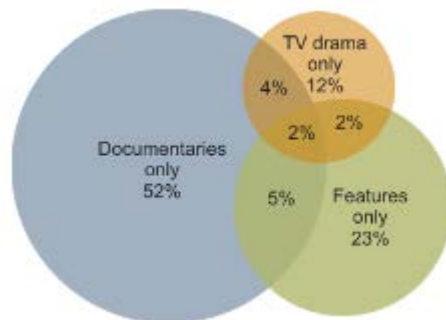
Against such a changing media landscape, it is timely to look at how to best support Australian documentary production with an eye to future viewing behaviour. This discussion paper focuses on the suite of funding programs currently managed through Screen Australia's Documentary Unit to ensure they best support a diverse range of Australian documentary content that delivers cultural objectives and that reaches, and resonates with, audiences. This in turn contributes to an innovative and more viable screen production industry.

The paper provides an overview of some of the issues Screen Australia must take into consideration in developing its funding programs. The 'Next steps' section on page 15 includes questions that can serve as thought starters for responses. We encourage participation in this discussion as we look to the ways our funding programs engage with the changing environment for documentary.

## Context

### Production environment

**Businesses:** Based on Screen Australia analysis, as of 2010, there were 394 active businesses engaged in drama or documentary production operating in Australia<sup>1</sup> of which 52 per cent (205 businesses) made documentaries only. A further 11 per cent (43 businesses) made documentaries as well as other content.

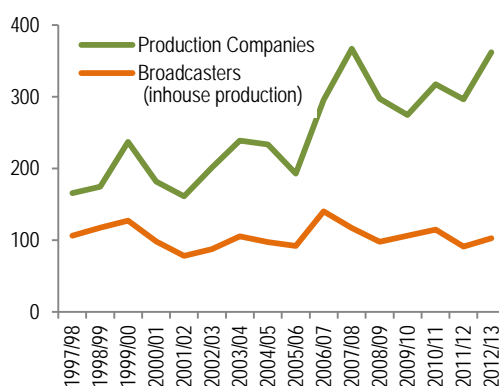


Source: Screen Australia databases: 394 active businesses.

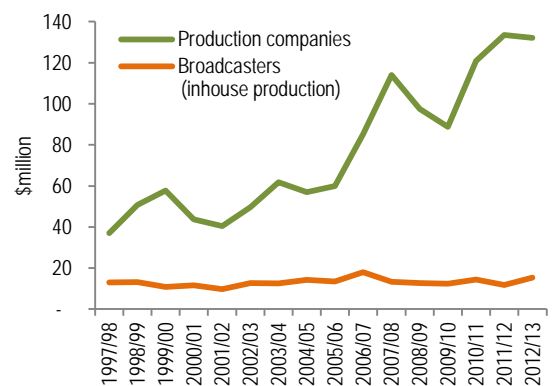
The number of documentary businesses reflects the scale of operators from individual independent documentary makers to large commercial companies.

**Activity:** Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) data indicates a dramatic increase in documentary production between the two most recent ABS industry surveys in 2006/07 and 2011/12. The number of broadcast hours doubled from 283 to 566, resulting in the total production cost tripling from \$39.8 million to \$158.5 million. The number of non-TV documentaries (including those made for cinema release) also doubled, from 79 to 168.<sup>2</sup> Annual data from Screen Australia also shows this growth:

#### **Production activity** **Hours made**



#### **Total budgets for all projects made**



Source: Screen Australia

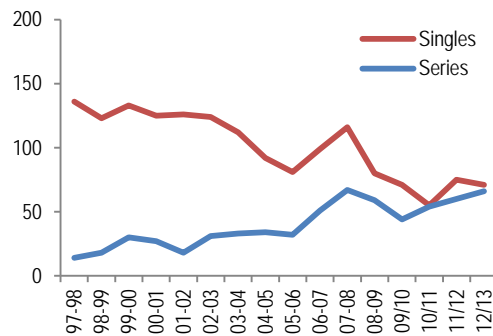
<sup>1</sup> 'Screen Australia databases; 'active businesses' were defined as having made at least one drama or documentary project between 2006/07 and 2009/10.

<sup>2</sup> Australian Bureau of Statistics, *Film, Television and Digital Games, Australia, 2011-12*. Screen Australia's annual data also shows this growth.

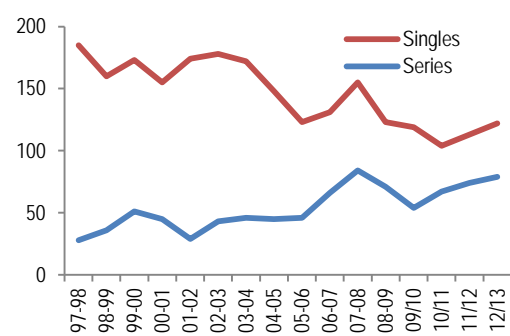
The increase in hours and production costs is due to a rise in the production of series, with the number of single documentaries decreasing.

**Number of documentaries produced, 1997/98-2012/13**

**Excluding inhouse**



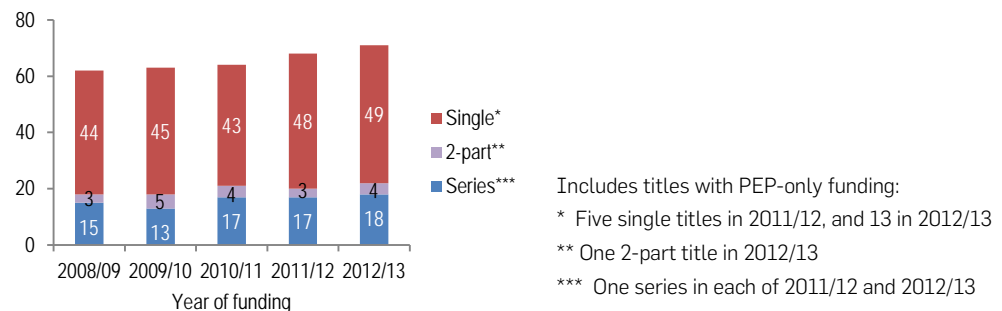
**Including inhouse**



Source: Screen Australia

This trend tends to reflect shifts in broadcaster commissioning strategies, rather than Screen Australia decisions. **Over the past five years, Screen Australia has provided funding for twice as many single documentaries as series, with the numbers of titles funded remaining relatively stable.** Since 2011, single titles have also accounted for the majority of projects accessing the Producer Equity Program without other Screen Australia funding.

**Number of documentaries funded by Screen Australia, 2008/09-2012/13**



Predictably, series tend to account for a larger proportion of hours and production budgets than singles, and an increase in production budgets of Screen Australia funded series is evident. Again, however, this has not tended to be at the expense of single titles, which have accounted for \$20-22 million over the past five years (see page 13).

**Tax incentives and content regulation:** As well as direct funding through Screen Australia the Australian Government also supports documentary production activity through measures such as tax incentives and content quotas.

The **Producer Offset** provides an incentive for production by providing a 20 per cent tax offset for all Australian projects produced for exhibition to the public through television broadcasting or as a video recording. Documentary projects must meet a minimum eligible expenditure requirement of \$500,000 and at least \$250,000 per hour, as well as be at least a broadcast half-hour in duration. Since the inception of the Offset in 2008 until June 2013, 343 documentaries had been certified for the 20 per cent offset at a cost of \$70 million. Feature documentaries intended for theatrical release may apply for a 40 per cent tax offset.

Since July 2011, producers of eligible lower-budget documentaries (i.e. costing \$500,000 or less) can apply to Screen Australia for up to 20 per cent of the budget through the **Producer Equity Program (PEP)**. Projects must be at least a broadcast half-hour in duration and have a budget of at least \$250,000 per hour. Of the 32 projects funded under PEP in 2012/13, just under half did not have funding through the Screen Australia Documentary Unit.

The **content quotas** on FTA television as contained in the *Australian Content Standard 2005* set out requirements for commercial broadcasters to invest in Australian documentary content. At present the commercial free-to-air broadcasters (Seven, Nine Network and Network Ten) are required to screen each year, between 6am and midnight, at least 20 hours of first-release Australian documentary programs, each of at least 30 minutes' duration. These programs can be screened on either the main channel or the digital channels.

In 2012 the broadcasters met the minimum levels of content: Seven broadcast 54.1 hours, Nine Network 21.5 hours and Network Ten 21 hours. Of the documentary content screened by the commercial broadcasters, the majority was produced without Screen Australia assistance and may not comply with Screen Australia's eligibility criteria.

## Screen Australia's contribution to documentary production

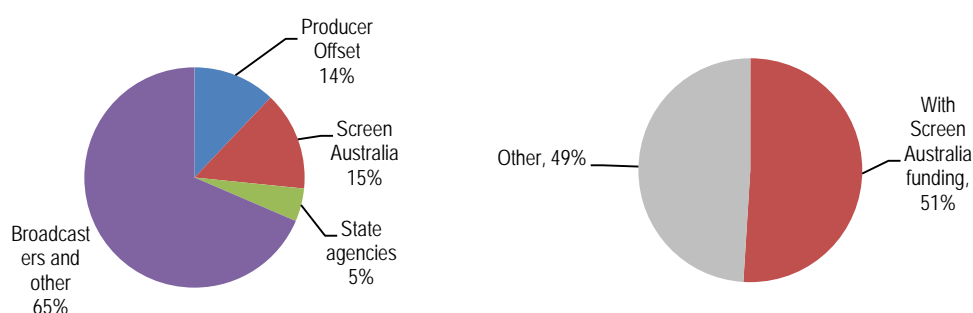
As a direct source of funds for documentary makers, Screen Australia plays an important role in ensuring the production of culturally relevant documentaries that may not otherwise be supported by the market. Such content deals with matters of national interest or importance to Australians, or illustrates or interprets aspects of Australia and Australians. By investing in documentary content, Screen Australia aims to engage audiences with Australian culture, identity and an Australian viewpoint on contemporary issues and ideas and the world at large.

At the same time, documentary producers form a vital part of the production industry that Screen Australia supports on a broader scale. As such, by supporting the production of otherwise risky content for broadcasters, Screen Australia contributes to ensuring a commercially innovative and more viable screen industry as well as facilitates access to Australian content for Australian audiences.

Overall, Screen Australia funding comprises a minor part of all documentary production finance, with the largest proportion coming from the broadcasters and other industry sources.

Total expenditure for documentaries made by production companies averaged \$115 million per year between 2008/09 and 2012/13. Of this total, Screen Australia provided 15 per cent (\$17 million), which also included \$2 million under the Producer Equity Program (PEP) in each of 2011/12 and 2012/13<sup>3</sup> as well as funding through Screen Australia's Indigenous Department and Feature Production programs. By comparison, industry sources (mainly broadcasters) provided 65 per cent, or \$75 million. See 'Sources of finance' graph below.

**Documentaries made by production companies, 2008/09-2012/13:**  
**Sources of finance** **Proportion of titles**



Even though Screen Australia provides only a small percentage of overall documentary funding, that funding underpins production across a larger number of *titles*. 51 per cent of documentaries produced by production companies since 2008/09 included finance from Screen Australia sector (as did 35 per cent of *all* documentaries made over that period). In particular, agency funding enables larger budgets, contributing to more ambitious projects.

<sup>3</sup> PEP was introduced in July 2011

For a description of each of Screen Australia's documentary funding programs, see Appendix A.

## Project funding for documentaries

Screen Australia administers approximately \$18-20 million in project funding each year for documentary content, mainly through its Documentary Unit, leveraging total budgets of around \$60 million. Around \$20 million each year is also accessed by documentary producers through the Producer Offset.

### 2012/13 documentary funding allocations

PROGRAM	Screen Australia funding	Hours funded	Projects funded	Minimum licence fee (broadcast hr)
<b>DOCUMENTARY UNIT</b>				
Documentary development	\$0.54m		37	n/a
National Documentary (NDP)	\$6.9m	29 hours	11	\$150,000
General Documentary (GDP)	\$3.3m	31.5 hours	14	\$135,000
International Documentary (IDP)	\$3.6m	21.5 hours	12	\$120,000
Signature Documentary (includes multi-platform)	\$2.1m	13.5 hours	12	n/a
Special initiatives	\$0.20	2.5 hours	5	n/a
Producer Equity Program	\$1.87m	7.5 hours		
- No SA investment			14	n/a
- With SA investment			18*	n/a
<b>OTHER</b>				
Feature Production (theatrical release)**	\$1m	1.7 hours	1	n/a
Indigenous Department programs	\$0.36m	1 hour	1 production 3 development	\$135,000
<b>TOTAL DIRECT</b>	<b>\$19.14m</b>			
<b>PRODUCER OFFSET</b>				
Feature docs	\$1.30m	2.75 hours	2	n/a
Non-feature docs	\$18.46m	217 hours	65	n/a
<b>TOTAL OFFSET</b>	<b>\$19.76m</b>	<b>219.75 hours</b>	<b>67</b>	
<b>GRAND TOTAL</b>	<b>\$39.16m</b>			

\* Includes projects funded by Screen Australia in 2012/13 and previous years

\*\*5-year average

### Theatrical documentary

Each year, Screen Australia invests in a small number of documentaries with a theatrical distributor attached through its Feature Production program. In addition, a number of projects funded through other programs, particularly the Signature Documentary program (or its predecessor, the Special Documentary Fund), have either been released theatrically or reached the big screen through an international festival selection. Some highlights of 'A list' festival selections are included at Appendix B.

For those documentaries shown in cinemas, the release has tended to be limited to a small number of screens (less than 20). However, in most cases the number of screens increased during the run, reflecting growing interest through word of mouth.

## Non project-based funding and support

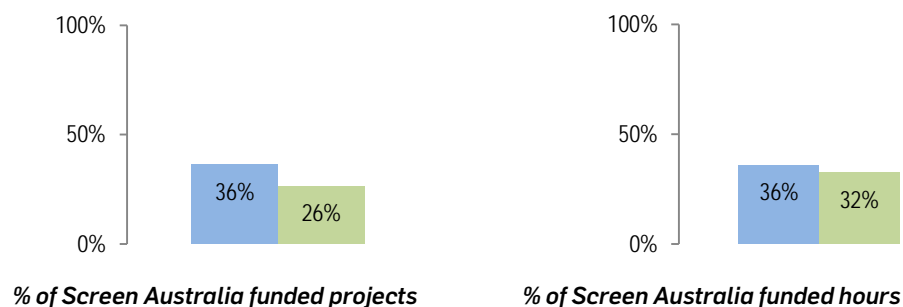
As well as project funding, Screen Australia provides enterprise funding to production companies making documentaries, as well as practical support for practitioners in the form of delegations and introductions at international markets. Under the Enterprise Asia program, for example, Screen Australia has funded three delegations of documentary makers to Malaysia and China targeted at building partnerships. Outside the enterprise programs, the agency provides travel grants to attend a range of international events (including grants for screenings and support for promotion of festival selected films); P&A loans to enhance a theatrical documentary's marketing campaign; and skills development via masterclasses, labs and online guides for practitioners as well as resources such as documentary budget and production paperwork templates.

The agency also supports the documentary sector more broadly through funding for film festivals and conferences (such as the Australian International Documentary Conference and Screen Producers Australia's Screen Forever) and their accompanying markets and pitching forums; funding for state and regional organisations; production of dedicated web and print materials promoting Australian documentaries; support for innovative distribution initiatives; and the compilation and publication of comprehensive statistics on production, funding, distribution and exhibition of Australian documentaries on the Screen Australia website.

### Impacts of the Enterprise program

There has been some discussion around Screen Australia's Enterprise Program<sup>4</sup> having a negative impact on the businesses of smaller documentary producers, with the contention that Enterprise-funded companies have had disproportionate access to Screen Australia production funding for their projects. However, analysis of the allocations of Screen Australia production funding between Enterprise and non-Enterprise companies shows that Enterprise companies accounted for a smaller proportion of funded projects after they had received Enterprise funding.

#### ***Projects from Enterprise companies approved for funding, as a proportion of all Screen Australia funded documentaries, before (blue) and after (green) receipt of Enterprise funding***



<sup>4</sup> Screen Australia is concurrently carrying out a review of the Enterprise Program. Public submissions closed on 31 January 2014.



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## Discussion

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Screen Australia's current suite of documentary funding programs arose from the 2010 Television Blueprint. The resultant programs were structured to meet the needs of audiences across an ever-expanding range of distribution platforms whilst also supporting diversity of content and a more viable production environment. These considerations remain paramount to any discussion around funding support.

On a more fundamental level, Screen Australia seeks to fund content that reflects the principles of quality, diversity and innovation:

- **Quality** – premium Australian content that resonates with contemporary audiences and creates a legacy of quality audiovisual content.
- **Diversity** – Australian content across a range of subjects, styles and approaches.
- **Innovation** – risk-taking and creativity that grows and evolves content across different forms.

These principles underpin our decision-making and are balanced with considerations around audience, platforms, and the broader production landscape.

### 1. Audiences

Documentary is a vehicle for transmitting to audiences stories by Australians, from Australia and/or about Australia. Documentaries can make you think about the world in a different way or deepen your understanding of a particular issue. Vital to this success is a documentary's ability to find and engage with audiences.

To ensure audience reach, most Screen Australia programs have required projects to have a guaranteed marketplace attachment. Despite the converged media environment, free-to-air (FTA) television is the main content-viewing platform, evidenced by Screen Australia's analysis of audiences and ratings.<sup>5</sup> There is a continued impetus to ensure that diverse Australian documentary content is available on those channels. To date, this has been reflected through the requirement of a presale to Australian FTA or subscription television to trigger eligibility for the National Documentary program (NDP), General Documentary program (GDP) or International Documentary program (IDP). Projects funded under the NDP are required to have a minimum domestic licence fee of \$150,000 per broadcast hour, GDP \$135,000 and IDP \$120,000.

The Signature and Multi-platform programs do not require a broadcaster presale. Signature is directed at projects with strong creative vision and ambition, which may be risk-taking in their subject matter or approach and have the potential to achieve acclaim through festival screenings and limited theatrical release over time. Some of these projects do deals for acquisitions by broadcasters in Australia or internationally (though for much lower figures than the minimum licence fees required under the other programs), and may also generate Screenrights revenue. The Multi-platform program is focused on interactive projects. In both cases, although a marketplace attachment is not required, applicants must still demonstrate a highly developed understanding of the project's audience and how to reach them.

The top-rating Screen Australia funded projects across each of the networks show that audiences have an interest in all different types of content and that this content is funded through many different programs. They also indicate much greater audiences for documentary content on the public broadcasters, with documentary content for the commercial broadcasters generally made without Screen Australia support.

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<sup>5</sup> Screen Australia, 'What to Watch' 2012

**Top-rating documentaries from Screen Australia funded slate, broadcast 1 Jan 2008 to 31 Dec 2013****National - ABC**

Year of funding	Title	Funding program	Series/ single	Duration (mins)	Network	Date released	Av. audience 000s		
							Combined Metro & Regional <sup>1</sup>	5-city Metro <sup>2</sup>	
1	2012/13	Whitlam: The Power and the Passion	NDP	Series	2x55	ABC1	26-May-13	1,467	1,044
2	2010/11	Dick Smith's Population Puzzle	GDP	Single	55	ABC1	12-Aug-10	1,435	1,010
3	2011/12	ABBA - Bang a Boomerang	GDP	Single	55	ABC1	30-Jan-13	1,423	965
4	2012/13	The Search for the Ocean's Super Predator	IDP	Single	55	ABC1	3-Nov-13	1,405	935
5	2008/09	Ned Kelly Uncovered	NDP	Single	55	ABC1	9-Jul-09	1,381	894

**National – SBS**

Year of funding	Title	Funding program	Series/ single	Duration (mins)	Network	Date released	Av. audience 000s		
							Combined Metro & Regional <sup>1</sup>	5-city Metro <sup>2</sup>	
1	2011/12	Go Back to Where You Came from series 2	GDP	Series	3x55	SBS one	28-Aug-12	1,056	794
2	2010/11	Go Back to Where You Came from series 1	GDP	Series	4x55	SBS one	21-Jun-11	889	611
3	2012/13	JFK: The Smoking Gun	IDP	Single	90	SBS one	3-Nov-13	873	635
4	2009/10	Who Do You Think You Are Series 3	GDP	Series	6x55	SBS one	28-Nov-10	798	581
5	2010/11	Who Do You Think You Are? series 4	GDP	Series	6x55	SBS one	27-Mar-12	732	525

**Commercial**

Year of funding	Title	Funding program	Series/ single	Duration (mins)	Network	Date released	Av. audience 000s		
							Combined Metro & Regional <sup>1</sup>	5-city Metro <sup>2</sup>	
1	2009/10	The Lost Diggers of Fromelles	GDP	Single	75	Seven	25-Apr-11	1,060	638
2	2010/11	Jack the Ripper	IDP	Single	55	Seven	9-May-12	697	452
3	2011/12	Outback Truckers ( <i>aka Mutha Truckers</i> )	IDP	Series	5x55	7mate	20-Oct-12	345	186
4	2008/09	Tackling Peace	NDP	Single	75	Ten	4-Jul-09	225	159
5	2012/13	Muddied Waters	PEP only	Single	44	7two	9-Dec-12	30	11

**Subscription**

Year of funding	Title	Funding program	Series/ single	Duration (mins)	Network	Date released	National audience 000s		
							Av. <sup>3</sup>	Cum. <sup>4</sup>	
1	2011/12	Christmas Lights Spectacular	PEP only	Single	55	LifeStyle	4-Dec-11	179	549
2	2010/11	The Bombing of Darwin: An Awkward Truth	NDP	Single	55	History	19-Feb-12	127	253
3	2011/12	Sydney Harbour - Life on the Edge	IDP	Single	55	Nat Geo	18-Aug-13	78	304
4	2010/11	Macquarie Father of Australia	IDP	Single	55	History	26-Jan-11	66	159
5	2010/11	The Digger	GDP	Single	90	History	25-Apr-11	66	145

Source notes: OzTAM and RegionalTAM

Average Audience: Average audience for first release of a particular title OR average audience per episode across first release of a series.  
Cumulative Viewing Impressions: the sum of average audience figures of all screenings between the first day of broadcast and 4 weeks after the program or series completed its first release broadcast.

*Free-to-air*: First release 1 Jan 2008 to 30 November 2013; ranked by combined Metro & Regional

1. Average audience, consolidated, all people, 5-city Metro & Regional (ex WA); first release
2. Average audience, 5-city Metro only, consolidated, all people; first release.

*Subscription*: First release STV 1 Jan 2008 to 30 November 2013; ranked by first release average audience.

3. Average audience, consolidated, all people, National; first release.

4. Cumulative Viewing Impressions, consolidated, all people, National; from first release to 4 weeks after completion of first release broadcast.

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Screen Australia-funded documentary projects have also had international success and international exposure through major film festivals and events, where they are well received by foreign audiences (see Appendix B for a list of projects that have travelled to key festivals). Again, they vary widely in subject matter and approach and have been supported through a range of Screen Australia's funding programs.

A great many documentaries are made without Screen Australia funding and many of these are very popular with audiences. The table below shows the top-rating documentaries for 2013, half of which received funding support from Screen Australia.

**Top-rating documentaries (5-city metro audiences) 2013**

Rank	Title	Network	Viewers ('000)
1	The Force – Behind the Line	7	1,154
2	Bali: Dark Side of Paradise	9	1,130
3	Whitlam: The Power and the Passion*	ABC1	1,044
4	Border Security – Australia's Front Line	7	966
5	Redesign My Brain*	ABC1	945
6	The Search for the Ocean's Super Predator*	ABC1	935
7	Air Rescue	7	877
8	Kakadu*	ABC1	799
9	Ten Bucks a Litre*	ABC1	740
10	Highway Patrol	7	735

\* Screen Australia supported titles

Source: OzTAM; compiled by Screen Australia.

All people, five-city metro average audience, 2013. Includes first and repeat screenings in one or more of the five-city metro regions. Ranked by average audience.

Metropolitan market data is copyright to OzTAM and may not be reproduced or published in whole or part without the prior consent of OzTAM.

## 2. Platforms

Tied to considerations around audience reach are the burgeoning of distribution platforms and new trends in viewer behaviour in accessing content. There are currently 17 digital FTA channels with catch-up services available, subscription television and its multitude of offerings and a growing list of online content providers such as Google Play, iTunes, BigpondTV, and Quickflix. Audiences are seeking out alternative viewing platforms in addition to traditional media platforms, but this has not yet significantly reduced audiences on FTA channels.

For this reason, the majority of Screen Australia funding (around 80 per cent in 2012/13) is currently allocated through programs which require projects to have a domestic broadcaster attached. The Signature and Multi-platform Documentary programs are designed to encourage innovation in documentary-making and are not tied to broadcast presale although marketplace attachment is assessed favourably.

Over time, however, a more platform-neutral approach may replace funding programs directed at specific distribution platforms such as broadcast television as the most effective way for Screen Australia to support documentary projects. The idea has already been floated by some sectors of the industry.

The challenge for Screen Australia in implementing such an approach is that a clear route to audience would always need to be demonstrated, and with business models for alternative platforms such as VOD still evolving, the mechanisms for demonstrating marketplace commitment are unclear. Further, the challenge extends beyond the funding stage: when a project has a commercial release online, for example, there is a need for platform-specific marketing strategies to ensure it is able to find its audience in a highly crowded and

competitive environment. Expertise in this area, such as through digital agencies, is still in early stages in this country.

In the current environment, as noted earlier, the broadcasters are contributing the lion's share of funding for documentary production, reflecting the dominance of FTA in delivering audiences through familiar business models. Screen Australia recognises that broadcasters have a vital role in Australia's documentary ecosystem, and expertise in reaching audiences. However, Screen Australia has an additional responsibility that goes beyond its stake as a minority investor. It has a clearly defined responsibility to audiences under the *Screen Australia Act 2008* and therefore it is in Screen Australia's remit to direct its funds to those projects characterised for their innovation, depth and compelling storytelling. The negotiation between these responsibilities and engagement with broadcaster priorities is set out in the investment and slate management principles which apply to programs which require broadcaster presale, ie:

- consultation with producers and broadcasters about the slate and upcoming priorities
- recognition of broadcaster expertise in connecting with audiences as part of the broadcaster's commissioning process
- reserving the right to make investment decisions based on published criteria that reflect the requirements of the Screen Australia Act, including placing an emphasis on programs with a high level of artistic and cultural merit and promoting the development of commercially focused screen production businesses.

At present, of the funding available under the domestic funding programs (the NDP and GDP), approximately 50 per cent is earmarked for content intended for the ABC, 40 per cent to the SBS and the remaining 10 per cent is for programs commissioned by the commercial broadcasters and subscription television.

This notional allocation of funding stems from a broadcasting environment in which it is mostly projects involving the public broadcasters that have tended to access documentary support. It is uncommon to see the commercial free-to-air broadcasters as the platform for projects applying for Screen Australia documentary funding, in part as the forms of content they tend to commission would not fit Screen Australia's eligibility criteria. Projects for broadcast on subscription channels are increasingly seeking to access Screen Australia funds, although this is off a low base.

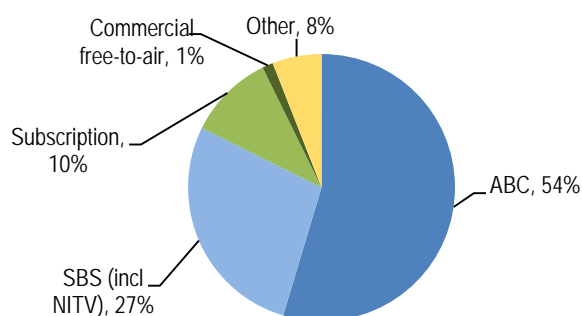
The allocation assists the public broadcasters and to some extent industry by providing greater funding certainty, but it reduces contestability. Whilst the public broadcasters still provide the most effective path to an audience in the current environment, we are already seeing producers explore other ways to reach audiences. Achieving this balance between funding content for today's audiences' favoured platforms and content that reaches out for new audiences is something that Screen Australia continues to focus on.

### 3. Diversity

Diversity can apply to many things: budget size, subject matter, the documentary maker's approach to the subject (e.g. observational, authorial, advocacy, narrative-driven), duration, format, target audience, media platform, broadcaster and production company/documentary maker. For Screen Australia, in any one year a diverse slate of programs may include a four-part high-budget nature series made by a large production company alongside a medium-budget, feature documentary looking at a historical event in depth; a 30-minute profile of a prominent Australian and a light-hearted low-budget web series exploring contemporary Australian attitudes to sexism. Regardless of form, Screen Australia seeks to fund content of quality; it should resonate with audiences and have cultural value.

In terms of **broadcaster** diversity, as noted in the previous section, the majority of Screen Australia's funds go to documentaries made for the public broadcasters:

**Release platforms' shares of Screen Australia funding; documentaries produced 2008/09–2012/13**



\* Other includes documentaries for theatrical and/or festival release

In terms of funding recipients, a wide range of **documentary producers** is represented. A total of 256 producers were attached to 300 documentaries that received production funding from Screen Australia between 2008/09 and 2012/13. 190 of those producers (74 per cent) had only one project financed through Screen Australia's documentary production funding programs during the five-year period.

**Producers receiving Screen Australia funding 2008/09–2012/13**

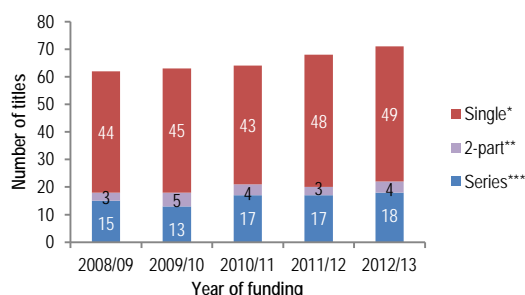
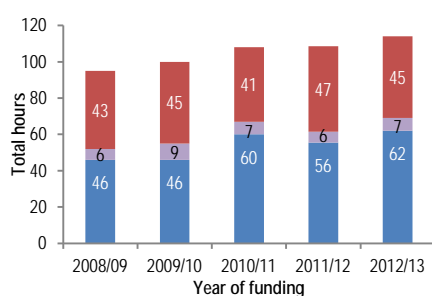
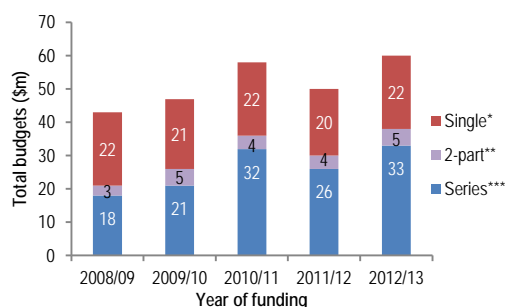
No. projects funded per producer	No. producers
10+	3
8	1
7	1
6	3
5	2
4	7
3	9
2	40
1	190 (141 for a single title and 49 for a series)

The issue of **single-episode documentaries vs series** is another aspect of the discussion around diversity.

Some documentary producers are critical of the apparent trend for the public broadcasters to commission series at the cost of single or one-off documentaries. Anecdotally, the public broadcasters, in seeking programming that is easier to market to fragmenting audiences, have sought larger, high-impact properties in the form of 'brand-building' series.

Screen Australia's statistics on funding decisions made from 2009/10 to 2012/13 show that there has been a gradual decrease in single-episode documentaries funded under the NDP and GDP but a corresponding increase in documentaries funded under the Signature fund (funding on average 14 documentaries per year). At the same time, there has been an increase in both hours produced and overall spend on documentary series.

It is important to note that a 'series' is defined as a project with more than one episode. This means that the equivalent of a feature-length documentary could classify as a series if it were broadcast over two nights. An example of this is *Whitlam: the Power and the Passion*, which was broadcast as 2 x 55 min programs.

**Screen Australia–funded documentary production 2008/09–2012/13, based on year of funding****Number of titles****Total hours****Total budgets**

\* Single titles with PEP-only funding: 5 titles (5 hours) worth \$1.6m in 2011/12; 13 titles (10 hours) worth \$3.9m in 2012/13

\*\* 2-part projects with PEP-only funding: 1 title (1 hour) worth \$0.5m in 2012/13.

\*\*\* Series with PEP-only funding: 1 title (1.5 hours) worth \$0.4m in 2011/12; 1 title (1.5 hours) worth \$0.5m in 2012/13.

**Cultural value and the NFSA's National Collection**

Intrinsic to Screen Australia's functions under the *Screen Australia Act 2008* is its role in supporting culturally relevant projects that resonate with audiences over time. Documentaries have a cultural value as they explore contemporary, social and historical ideas and attitudes, events and issues, and reflect in-depth research, storytelling craft and high production values. They shape our interpretations of history and have the power to move public opinion and influence behaviour. It is the uniqueness of the Australian worldview that sets Australian documentaries apart. A culturally relevant documentary slate also indirectly serves the needs of the educational sector and enables students to explore issues from different angles.

One of the ways cultural value is recognised is through the deposit of projects with the National Film and Sound Archive (NFSA) as part of the national collection of audiovisual material. Under Screen Australia's terms of trade, a copy of all funded content must be archived with the NFSA. Special conditions apply to the NDP, which requires the production company to grant a non-exclusive licence in the project for the right to use original documentary footage and other related material for use as library material for educational purposes and future productions by Australian filmmakers. This footage can then be accessed by other documentary makers for up to 10 minutes of broadcast under the Zero Fee Licensing Scheme (see [NFSA website](#)).

Whilst Screen Australia does not advocate for all documentary content to be subject to special archiving requirements, it does acknowledge that Australian documentary makers play an important role in contributing to the nation's cultural heritage.

## 4. Sources of finance

Due to the limited sources of finance in Australia, it is pragmatic for documentary makers to look internationally for alternative finance sources. International finance encourages producers to develop factual content with international appeal, thus broadening the slate, and reduces the demand on Australian broadcasters. It also encourages projects of greater complexity and budget scale due to the increased finance base. Over the last four years, Screen Australia-financed documentaries have attracted an average of \$3 million per year in foreign finance, to an average of 13 projects.

Screen Australia provides an incentive for international co-financing through the International Documentary Program (IDP), which requires projects to have an international presale and minimum level of international finance as well as accepting a lower domestic presale than the NDP or GDP.

The IDP aims to support producers in developing genuine arm's length international relationships to generate foreign investment. However, a recent trend toward company mergers or buyouts has meant that an IDP applicant may be a 'related party' of an international distributor or sales agent. Where such an arrangement exists, no new international relationships or ongoing foreign investment in future production are generated, limiting the ability of the program to stimulate growth for the Australian production sector.

Aside from international sources of finance, producers are increasingly looking to philanthropy and crowd-funding to build their finance plan. Documentaries are particularly suited to raising funds through these methods as they are often issue-based and therefore can be targeted at special interest groups and organisations. The Documentary Australia Foundation is one organisation focussed on connecting documentary projects with philanthropic support.

Crowd-funding is another way producers can raise finance as well as grow an audience ahead of a project's completion. However, documentary makers need to be realistic about how much money they can raise and, in order for these funds to be included in a finance plan, they must already be committed and received by the fundraiser.

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## Next steps

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This paper has set out key data on Australian documentary production (with additional, more detailed data available in the appendices), along with an overview of the production environment, a description of Screen Australia's current funding and support mechanisms and some of the issues that the agency, and broader industry, will need to take into account in helping build the Australian documentary sector into the future.

Total direct Screen Australia funding available for documentary is approximately \$20 million. There is little scope to increase this but there is the opportunity to revisit funding allocations, within the current program structure or an altogether different approach.

In doing this, it is important for Screen Australia to consider how it can best support a wide range of content that reflects the principles of:

- **quality** – premium Australian content that resonates with contemporary audiences and creates a legacy of quality audiovisual content
- **diversity** – Australian content across a range of subjects, styles, and approaches
- **innovation** – risk-taking and creativity that grows and evolves content across different forms, and reaches the **widest possible audiences**.

## Questions for discussion

We invite comment particularly focused on the questions below, but encourage participation beyond this where relevant to the purpose of the discussion.

- Are specific targeted programs such as the current suite of documentary programs efficient and effective?
- How can Screen Australia best support low-budget documentary making?
- How can high-end documentaries reach the broadest possible audience?
- Should Screen Australia continue to offer separate theatrical funding for documentaries or should it create one funding program for 'premium' documentaries, regardless of platform?
- Could a requirement for marketplace commitment be met in ways other than a broadcaster presale?
- If so, what sort of indicators of audience reach and engagement could Screen Australia reasonably expect filmmakers to provide for their projects?
- What are the impacts (positive and negative) on the industry of the notional broadcaster funding allocations which currently apply to the NDP and GDP? Should these be revised?
- In making decisions about whether to invest in projects, what considerations should be prioritised (eg cultural, innovation, audience reach)?
- What are the advantages and disadvantages of Screen Australia accepting applications in rounds versus at any time?

## How to contribute

Moderated discussions will take place in conjunction with the Australian International Documentary Conference (AIDC) in March 2014. Written submissions to the discussion paper will be accepted for up to four weeks following AIDC, ie until 4 April 2014. Send to [feedback@screenaustralia.gov.au](mailto:feedback@screenaustralia.gov.au)

Screen Australia will then evaluate its programs in line with the discussions and issue revised guidelines for comment prior to being finalised for release.



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## Appendices

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### Appendix A: Screen Australia's current documentary funding programs

The **Documentary Development Program** assists experienced documentary makers to achieve planned outcomes for the development of their projects. This could include further research, writing the next draft of a script or treatment, strategic shooting and/or editing to attract marketplace development or production finance, or compiling a sizzle reel. The program is primarily focused on providing development support to one-off projects.

The **National Documentary Program (NDP)** aims to provide a comprehensive and strategic slate of projects across time, involving a diversity of styles and formats, and encompassing a broad range of themes of national and cultural significance with heritage value. These projects have a sense of cultural ambition and a budget scale that separates them from other Screen Australia documentary investments.

The **General Documentary Program (GDP)** supports quality, audience-engaging and culturally relevant projects on a lower budget scale. The program is based on matched funding with a broadcaster, acknowledging the key role played by free-to-air and subscription television in providing access to Australian documentaries.

The **International Documentary Program** supports Australian projects that have international finance as well as a domestic broadcast licence fee. The aim is to:

- bring additional, international funds into the Australian documentary production sector by encouraging the producers' direct use of international finance, and
- support producers to build and maintain international production partnerships.

The **Signature Documentary program** supports documentary storytelling that is bold in form and/or content, with a strong creative vision and the potential for national and international acclaim. The stories can be local or international with Australian authorship, produced for the big screen. Projects need to demonstrate a highly developed understanding of how to reach and engage their target audience.

Funding for interactive documentary projects has been provided through a number of programs over the years, most recently through the Signature Program. These funds have been increased to \$1 million and from 2014, are offered through a dedicated **Multi-platform Documentary program**.

Screen Australia offers special initiatives from time to time with specific objectives. In 2012/13, **Opening Shot 3**, an initiative for young filmmakers in partnership with the ABC, aimed to give voice to other points of view on contemporary Australian life as well as advancing the careers of a new generation of program makers.

The **Producer Equity program (PEP)**, administered by the Documentary Unit since its introduction in 2011, provides a direct payment of funds to producers of eligible low-budget Australian documentaries, equal to 20 per cent of the approved budget.

The **Feature Production program**, administered through the Production Investment department, aims to assist in the creation of a diverse range of successful Australian films that resonate with their audiences. Documentary projects intended for cinema release must be able to demonstrate a big-screen, visual quality, with clear cinematic potential.

## Appendix B: Screen Australia-funded documentaries screening at A-list festivals\*

\* Berlin, Busan, IDFA, Rotterdam, Edinburgh, Sheffield, Sundance, Telluride, Toronto, Hot Docs, SXSW, Venice

Title	Funding program	Festival	Year	Country
<b>FUNDED 2008/09</b>				
Contact	International	International Documentary Film Festival Amsterdam	2009	Netherlands
The Hungry Tide	General	International Documentary Film Festival Amsterdam	2011	Netherlands
Mother of Rock: The Life and Times of Lillian Roxon	NDP	Toronto International Film Festival	2010	Canada
<b>FUNDED 2009/10</b>				
The First Interview	Signature	Telluride Film Festival	2011	United States
Goa Hippy Tribe	Innovation	International Documentary Film Festival Amsterdam	2011	Netherlands
		Interactive Award, Film and Television category	2012	United States
Life In Movement: The Tanja Liedtke Story	Signature	Edinburgh International Film Festival	2011	United Kingdom
Machete Maidens Unleashed!	International	International Film Festival Rotterdam	2011	Netherlands
		Toronto International Film Festival	2010	Canada
Memoirs of a Plague	Signature	Hot Docs - Canadian International Documentary Festival	2011	Canada
		International Documentary Film Festival Amsterdam	2010	Netherlands
On Borrowed Time	General	Telluride Film Festival	2012	United States
Scarlet Road	General	Hot Docs - Canadian International Documentary Festival	2012	Canada
		Sheffield International Documentary Festival	2012	United Kingdom
		South by Southwest Festival (SXSW)	2012	United States
The Tall Man	NDP	International Documentary Film Festival Amsterdam	2011	Netherlands
		Toronto International Film Festival	2011	Canada
Then the Wind Changed	Signature	International Documentary Film Festival Amsterdam	2011	Netherlands
<b>FUNDED 2010/11</b>				
Make Hummus Not War	Signature	Berlin International Film Festival	2013	Germany
Missing in the Land of the Gods	Signature	International Documentary Film Festival Amsterdam	2012	Netherlands
<b>FUNDED 2011/12</b>				
Coral Rekindling Venus	Feature Production	Sheffield International Documentary Festival Nominated for The Sheffield Innovation Award	2013	United Kingdom
		Sundance Film Festival	2013	United States
Mad As Hell: The Peter Finch Story	General	Busan International Film Festival	2011	South Korea
Miss Nikki and The Tiger Girls	Signature	International Documentary Film Festival Amsterdam	2012	Netherlands
The Network	International	Sheffield International Documentary Festival	2013	United Kingdom
		South by Southwest Festival (SXSW)	2013	United States
Storm Surfers 3D	Feature Production	Toronto International Film Festival	2012	Canada
<b>FUNDED 2012/13</b>				
Aim High In Creation!	Feature Production	International Documentary Film Festival Amsterdam	2013	Netherlands
The Darkside	Indigenous	Berlin International Film Festival	2014	Germany

## Appendix C: Supplementary data on Screen Australia-funded documentaries

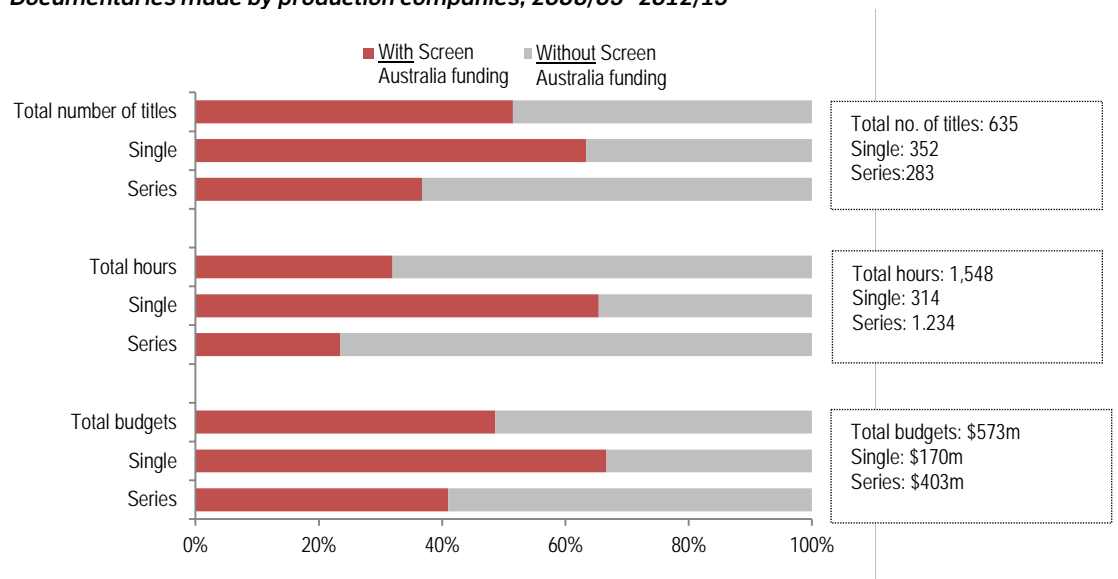
### Screen Australia in the production slate

51 per cent of documentaries made by production companies since 2008/09 included finance from Screen Australia (as did 35 per cent of *all* documentaries, including those made inhouse by broadcasters). Screen Australia-funded projects accounted for 30 per cent of total hours produced, and 55 per cent of total budgets.

Most single-episode Australian documentaries received Screen Australia funding – 63 per cent of all projects, 65 per cent of total hours and 67 per cent of total budgets.

A relatively small proportion of series were financed by Screen Australia – 37 per cent of titles, 23 per cent of hours and 41 per cent of total budgets.

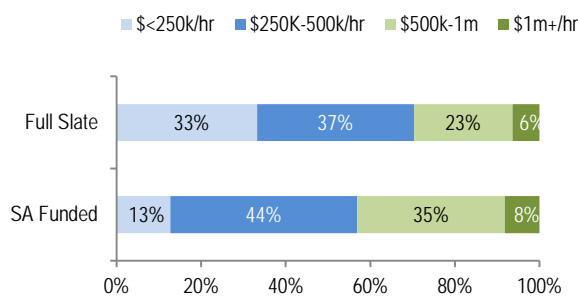
### Documentaries made by production companies, 2008/09–2012/13



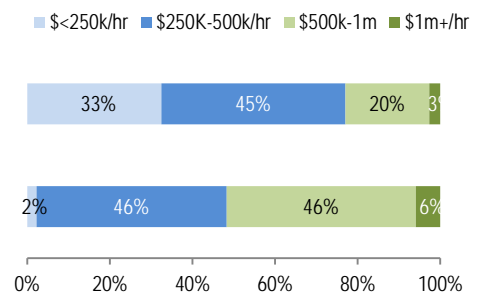
### Budget ranges

Documentaries with Screen Australia funding generally have higher budgets than the full slate. 43 per cent of single documentaries and 52 per cent of series financed by Screen Australia had budgets over \$500,000 per hour, compared to 29 per cent of all singles and 23 per cent of series made by production companies.

#### Singles



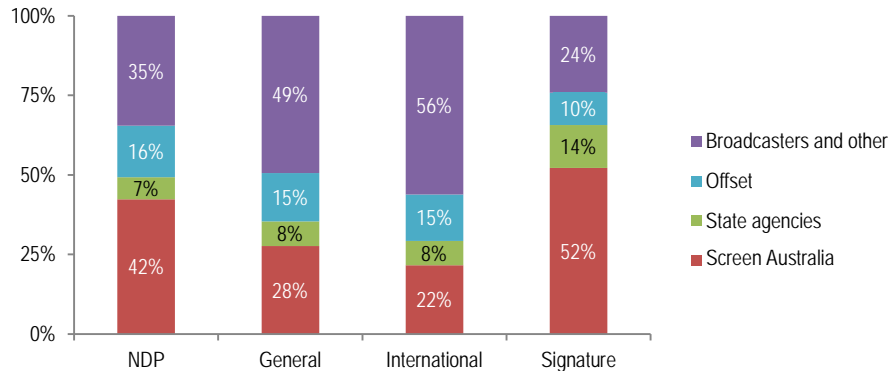
#### Series



### **Finance sources**

For Signature and NDP documentaries produced between 2008/09 and 2012/13, Screen Australia finance has provided the largest proportion of total budgets – 52 per cent for Signature projects and 42 per cent for NDP projects. In keeping with the program aims and requirements, industry and other sources (including local and foreign broadcasters) have provided the largest proportion of finance for General and International documentaries.

#### **Relative contributions to project finance for each Screen Australia funding program**



### **Enterprise program**

Of the 29 screen businesses supported through the first five rounds of Enterprise funding, 18 have produced at least one documentary since receiving Enterprise funding.

Analysis of the activities of Group 1 and 2 Enterprise companies (the 16 companies supported in 2009 and 2010) shows:

- Just over half reported having documentaries in development over the last three years.
- In aggregate, companies reported 28 documentaries in production the year before they received Enterprise funding, and 31 in the last financial year. Hours increased from 72 to 88.5.
- In aggregate, 19 projects were financed without Screen Australia direct investment the year prior to receiving Enterprise funding (across all project types). In 2012/13, this increased to 32 projects, nine of which were documentaries.

For more information see the Enterprise Program Review Discussion Paper at: [www.screenaustralia.gov.au/EnterpriseConsult](http://www.screenaustralia.gov.au/EnterpriseConsult)

## Appendix D: Data on the Australian documentary sector

Screen Australia has been publishing comprehensive data on documentary activity in Australia online since 2000 (and prior to that, in print through *Get the Picture*, since 1989).

This data is updated annually for release at the Australian International Documentary Conference. The latest updates take the production figures to 2012/13, [providing 16 years of detailed analysis](#). Highlights are presented below with links through to full details.

### **PRODUCTION**

#### **Production activity**

Australia has produced nearly 5,700 hours of documentaries since 1997/98, an average of 355 hours per year. In 2012/13, the documentary production slate comprised 465 hours (201 titles), worth \$147 million.

[www.screenaustralia.gov.au/research/statistics/mpdocosactivity.aspx](http://www.screenaustralia.gov.au/research/statistics/mpdocosactivity.aspx)

#### **Activity by production companies and broadcasters**

The majority of documentaries are made by independent production companies. Annual activity by production companies has grown significantly since 1997/98 to 362 hours in 2012/13. Around 100 hours per year have been made inhouse by broadcasters, with little variation year-to-year.

[www.screenaustralia.gov.au/research/statistics/mpdocosactivity.aspx](http://www.screenaustralia.gov.au/research/statistics/mpdocosactivity.aspx)

#### **Proportion of overall screen production activity**

The Australian Bureau of Statistics released results of the 2011/12 business survey in June 2013. This data indicates that documentary production accounted for 6 per cent of total film and television production in 2011/12, up from 2-3 per cent in 2006/07. Some preliminary analysis of the ABS survey is available here: [Key indicators, 2011/12 and 2006/07](#). Screen Australia will be publishing further analysis over the coming months.

#### **Location of company**

Since 1997/98, most documentaries have been made by production companies based in NSW (63 per cent of hours), followed by Victoria, Western Australia and Queensland.

[www.screenaustralia.gov.au/research/statistics/mpdocoscompany.aspx](http://www.screenaustralia.gov.au/research/statistics/mpdocoscompany.aspx)

### **FILMMAKERS**

#### **Number and gender**

Based on analysis of 933 documentaries shot over the past five years, there are 507 currently active documentary producers in Australia, 391 directors and 353 writers. Women account for 45 per cent of the producers, 36 per cent of the directors and 37 per cent of the writers.

[www.screenaustralia.gov.au/research/statistics/oefilmakersdocos.aspx](http://www.screenaustralia.gov.au/research/statistics/oefilmakersdocos.aspx)

Although there were fewer female documentary makers overall, female producers, directors and writers of Australian documentaries were more likely to have two or more credits than their male counterparts.

[www.screenaustralia.gov.au/research/statistics/oefilmakersdocoexperience.aspx](http://www.screenaustralia.gov.au/research/statistics/oefilmakersdocoexperience.aspx)

#### **Experience**

While the majority of documentary filmmakers had only one credit over the last three decades, they were more likely to have multiple credits than Australian feature filmmakers. In a similar pattern to feature films, documentary writers (both male and female) were the least likely to have two or more credits.

[www.screenaustralia.gov.au/research/statistics/oefilmakersdocoactivity.aspx](http://www.screenaustralia.gov.au/research/statistics/oefilmakersdocoactivity.aspx)

## **PROJECTS**

### **Single and series**

Overall, production of single titles has declined since 1997/98, while series production has increased.

[www.screenaustralia.gov.au/research/statistics/mpdocosactivity.aspx](http://www.screenaustralia.gov.au/research/statistics/mpdocosactivity.aspx)

### **Budget ranges**

Over the last six years, the majority of both single and series documentaries have been made for less than \$500,000 per hour (in 2013 dollars).

[www.screenaustralia.gov.au/research/statistics/mpdocosbudget.aspx](http://www.screenaustralia.gov.au/research/statistics/mpdocosbudget.aspx)

### **Duration and cost per hour**

The average duration per title for single documentaries has remained around 0.95 commercial broadcast hours since 1997/98. The average duration for series has increased from 4.2 hours (1997/98–2004/05) to 4.6 hours (2005/06–2012/13).

For series, the cost per commercial broadcast hour (in 2013 dollars) has remained fairly consistent over the last 16 years, at around \$300,000. For single titles, cost per hour has been more variable, typically ranging between \$300,000 and \$500,000. In 2011/12 it hit a record high of \$707,377, boosted by a small number of titles with very high budgets.

[www.screenaustralia.gov.au/research/statistics/mpdocoscostperhour.aspx](http://www.screenaustralia.gov.au/research/statistics/mpdocoscostperhour.aspx)

## **FINANCE SOURCES**

Industry sources (mainly broadcasters including the ABC and SBS) provide the majority of finance to the independent documentary slate - 65 per cent since 2007/08. Screen Australia contributes around 16 per cent (including funding through the Producer Equity Program, introduced in July 2011), the state agencies 5 per cent and the Producer Offset, cashflowed in various ways, 14 per cent.

[www.screenaustralia.gov.au/research/statistics/mpdocosfinancesrc.aspx](http://www.screenaustralia.gov.au/research/statistics/mpdocosfinancesrc.aspx)

### **Federal Government funding**

Federal Government funding is available directly, through Screen Australia, and indirectly, through the Producer Offset. Over the last six years, Screen Australia finance (with or without the Producer Offset) was present across all budget ranges, and most Offset documentaries also had Screen Australia finance.

The Producer Equity Program was introduced in July 2011, replacing the Producer Offset for eligible low-budget documentaries (budgets of \$500,000 or less) with a direct payment equal to 20 per cent of the approved budget. The program contributed 1 per cent of total funding to the documentary slate in each of 2011/12 and 2012/13, its first two years of operation.

[www.screenaustralia.gov.au/research/statistics/mpdocosgovtfundfed.aspx](http://www.screenaustralia.gov.au/research/statistics/mpdocosgovtfundfed.aspx)

## **ON SCREEN**

### **First-release documentaries on free-to-air TV**

The majority of first-release documentaries on free-to-air television have been screened by the public broadcasters (this includes both programs made by production companies and those made inhouse by the channels). In 1996 a quota was introduced requiring the commercial free-to-air networks to broadcast at least 10 hours of first-run Australian documentary content annually, increased to 20 hours in 1999. Since the mid-2000s, all three networks have been regularly exceeding these levels, boosted by some long-running titles such as *Find My Family*, *RSPCA Animal Rescue* and *The Force – Behind the Line* on Seven, *RPA* and *Missing Persons Unit* on Nine, and *Bondi Rescue* and *Bondi Vet* on Ten.

[www.screenaustralia.gov.au/research/statistics/mrstdocostv.aspx](http://www.screenaustralia.gov.au/research/statistics/mrstdocostv.aspx)

### **TV ratings**

The top-rating Australian documentary on free-to-air television in 2013 was *The Force – Behind the Line*.

[www.screenaustralia.gov.au/research/statistics/tvratingdocoseries.aspx](http://www.screenaustralia.gov.au/research/statistics/tvratingdocoseries.aspx)

### **Documentaries released in cinemas**

Between 1988 and 2013, an average of seven Australian documentaries were released annually in Australian cinemas.

[www.screenaustralia.gov.au/research/statistics/mrstdocoscin.aspx](http://www.screenaustralia.gov.au/research/statistics/mrstdocoscin.aspx)

### **Top documentaries at the box office**

The top Australian documentary of all time at the Australian box office is the IMAX title, *Antarctica* (released 1996). The top non-IMAX documentary is *Bra Boys* (released 2007).

[www.screenaustralia.gov.au/research/statistics/mrboxtopdoco.aspx](http://www.screenaustralia.gov.au/research/statistics/mrboxtopdoco.aspx)

### **Festivals and awards**

Australian documentaries are regularly screened at international festivals. In 2013, there were 19 screenings of Australian documentaries across the 29 key international festivals tracked by Screen Australia.

[www.screenaustralia.gov.au/research/statistics/festawards.aspx](http://www.screenaustralia.gov.au/research/statistics/festawards.aspx)