

**DRAFT PROGRAM GUIDELINES**  
Response from animator Lee Whitmore  
(02 96601158)

Fiona Cameron  
Executive Strategy Director  
Screen Australia

Dear Fiona,

I am an independent Australian filmmaker with a long track record making award winning short animated films. In the seventies and eighties I worked as a designer on short dramas, features, and documentary. **Like many of us my career has been made possible by the Creative Development branch of the AFC.** The new shift in emphasis now proposed by Screen Australia as to who gets support and why has been coming for some time. However the proposed magnitude of this shift is alarming. Those who will benefit from these new guidelines will be producers and business people aiming to make our film culture into a sustainable business. The industry will almost certainly lose many good writers, directors and small producers.

**From an animation perspective these guidelines effectively CLOSE THE DOOR on mature independent animators like myself continuing to make films.** Lost is the idea of supporting films that are simply worth making and important to our film culture and important to defining what it means to be Australian. What are we prepared to lose in the interests of prevailing market forces? A lot it seems.

Why does Screen Australia think that by giving a large proportion of funds to producers to develop projects that it is going to get more box office successes? There is no evidence at all to support the idea that producer driven projects are better or more successful than writer driven or director driven films. It just isn't the way films happen. Even the most successful and commercially driven American producers will always say you can't predict what is going to succeed. Good films come into being by passionate people who are driven to make them.

**The Draft Guidelines are the clearest evidence yet for the urgent need for an animation representative to be permanently employed by Screen Australia to work alongside drama and documentary filmmakers and bureaucrats in the**

decision making process. This document reveals a lack of knowledge and understanding about animation that is serious.

Animation needs support at both the commercial end of the spectrum and the independent. We need to make TV series and animated features but we also need to maintain a healthy, vibrant, short animation culture. Short animations allow for innovation and are the ground from which commercial work springs. Our independent short animated films are admired around the world as being outstanding and culturally unique. Three of these films have been nominated recently for Oscars and one won –‘Harvey Krumpet’. Annecy, France, recently held a retrospective of Australian Short Award Winning Animations. I’m sure my peers will say more about the significance and successes of our Independent short form animation culture.

How will the draft guidelines affect our hard won independent animation culture?

- With no support for mature independent short animation production the work and glory so recently gained by our animators will die. There simply will be no independent sector making films beyond the quality or ambition of Tropfest or final project coursework films. The short film production must be open to new and experienced animators alike.
- Insisting on teams and producers on all projects will mean many animators will no longer be eligible. For many small scale projects producers are simply not desirable with many animators choosing to work independently. Flexibility is essential on this point.

There are only a small handful of producers either wise to animation production or interested in pursuing it.. The guidelines can’t reasonably make ‘having a producer on board’ a pre-requisite for securing funding while this is the case. .

- Time limits (15mins) and unrealistic budgets (\$80,000 i.e \$5,300 per minute) are restrictive and not professional. A two tier system may work here where some short projects apply for up to \$80,000 and others up to \$300,000 (25 mins).

Given the advances to animation since the digital revolution I believe a complete rethink about the medium is necessary. The amazing

integration of animation techniques in all forms of filmmaking especially in features but also commercials and documentaries is often so seamless as to be unnoticeable. We now have so many hybrid forms such as the animated serious adult drama and the animated documentary that what we should be looking at is allowing for these forms within the guidelines for drama and documentary development and production

## MY FILMS

With government support I have made four substantial independent animated films ranging from seven minutes to twenty six minute films over the last twenty five years. I work full time and the longest production period was on my second film “On a Full Moon” (17mins) which took five years to make. I work largely solo as writer, director, designer and animator. On three of the four films I had a producer but retained Intellectual Property. However on my last film, ‘The Safe House’, produced by Film Australia, I lost I.P. This is not a situation I am prepared to repeat. It just doesn’t hold when you create original work and draw every frame individually. Loss of I.P.if working with big producers is almost inevitable.

I am passionate about making films and wish to make more. The money I have received from the government has gone directly into production. The films don’t make me rich, but they are worth making. Many other animators in this country work this way, and I ask that we be allowed to continue. For the benefit of the next generation of independent animators I ask that the short one off animated form be respectfully and properly supported. These films will continue to bring rich returns to our film culture and will be watched for many years to come.

## OUR FILMS

With the guidelines’ emphasis on TV series and features, and creating a sustainable business out of an art form, I believe we are in danger of losing it all. We must have a diverse Australian film industry and not put all our eggs in the ‘big returns’ basket. I want to see truly Australian feature animations, Australian animated TV Series and Australian short animations. We are a tiny country and film is an expensive medium. If we sacrifice everything to please market forces we will be making American films. We must continue in the spirit of making all kinds of Australian films by all kinds of people for ourselves and a world ready to know more about this county.