

Screen Australia
Documentary Funding Review Submission

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Having been in charge of Documentary Development and also deeply involved in Documentary Production investment decision making for 16 years, at Film Victoria, I offer the following suggestions:

To redress the gross imbalance in the proportion of Screen Australia production funds devoted to projects with prior market place commitments, in the form of TV presales, distribution guarantees or advances, as against those without such commitments, Screen Australia needs to massively increase funding for *Signature Docs*.

A balanced policy would involve half of such funds being devoted to projects with prior market place commitments and half to those without such commitments. This would reflect Screen Australia's commitment to attaching truly equal value to commercially driven projects and culturally valuable ones.

Signature Docs currently has only sufficient funds to support around 12 projects per year. In view of population concentrations and associated competitive advantage/disadvantages, this restricts opportunities for receiving funding via this initiative in NSW and Victoria to around 3 projects in each of these States per year - making it impossible to support more than 1 project per year in each of the other 6 States and territories (WA, S.A, the N.T, Queensland, ACT and Tasmania).

Assuming that no additional funds are available, Screen Australia should also consider supporting more projects to a lesser degree, with far more emphasis on the provision of post-production completion funds than is currently the case, particularly for *low budget* projects without TV presales. For new and emerging players, who mainly shoot their own material using their own equipment, it's this stage of production which is the most challenging and the most deserving of support - the other stage being *development* and *time critical* shooting.

Regarding Screen Australia's allocation for projects with domestic presales, I propose that half of its current documentary production budget be allocated directly to the broadcasters in question at the beginning of each financial year and that they alone be responsible for determining which projects this will be allocated to, but subject to the same, or very similar, Screen Australia diversity criteria that currently apply.

This would relieve Screen Australia of its huge administrative responsibilities in this regard and free up human resources to concentrate on the assessment and monitoring of projects without market place commitments. Conversely, Producers of such projects would benefit from a more *one-stop shop* approach to production funding that this would entail. No longer would it be necessary to apply to Screen Australia for production funds and no longer would Producers have to experience the often highly impractical wait for Screen Australia decisions which may, or may not, green-light their pre-sold projects.

Regarding *theatrical docs*: These should be assessed independently of other feature films in order to enable them to compete on a more level playing field.