



Screen Australia's Indigenous Department turns 25

Thursday 30 August 2018: Indigenous screen industry veterans and emerging artists came together this morning at Carriageworks, Redfern to celebrate 25 years of Screen Australia's Indigenous Department.

In attendance were director **Rachel Perkins** (*Mystery Road* TV series, *Bran Nue Dae*), director and actor **Leah Purcell** (*Redfern Now*, *Wentworth*), and directors **Ivan Sen** (*Mystery Road*, *Goldstone*), **Dylan River** (*Nulla Nulla*) and **Warwick Thornton** (*Samson & Delilah*, *Sweet Country*).

The screen creatives were joined by audience favourites **Rob Collins** (*Cleverman*), **Elaine Crombie** (*8MMM*, *Kiki and Kitty*), **Aaron Fa'Aoso** (*Little J & Big Cuz*, *The Straits*), **Aaron McGrath** (*Mystery Road* TV series, *Jasper Jones*), **Hunter Page-Lochard** (*Spear*, *Cleverman*) and **Tasia Zalar** (*Mystery Road* TV series, *The Warriors*).

"When Wal Saunders set up the Indigenous Department in 1993, it would have been unthinkable that over 160 First Nations screen stories would end up being made. Twenty five years later, it's unthinkable to imagine the Australian screen industry without our Indigenous stories and the people who tell them," said **Penny Smallacombe** Head of Indigenous at Screen Australia. This anniversary is an incredibly special moment in Australia's cultural history, and one that Indigenous people can treasure."

"Today I looked around the room and saw 25 years of progress personified," **Penny Smallacombe** Head of Indigenous at Screen Australia noted, "For instance, Warwick Thornton and Rachel Perkins were part of the very first short film series funded by the Indigenous Department, and a quarter of century later Warwick is a Caméra d'Or-winning director and Rachel just helmed the most successful ABC iview drama in history - *Mystery Road*. And significantly, new names such as Dylan River, Aaron McGrath and Tasia Zalar have worked on projects from both Warwick and Rachel, so we're seeing generational and sustained change. I cannot tell you how significant that is, knowing that young Indigenous people will grow up seeing themselves on screen."

The Indigenous screen community will formally mark the anniversary this evening with a showcase at Carriageworks. The event is being staged with the generous support of the ABC and NITV, plus Film Victoria, Screenwest, Documentary Australia Foundation, Shark Island Institute, Adelaide Film Festival and Carriageworks.

Follow the conversation on Twitter: [@ScreenAustralia](#) and [#OurStories25](#)

MEDIA MATERIALS

Download high resolution images and footage from the media call [here](#).

- All photos are credit Daniel Boud for Screen Australia.
- Footage is credit Screen Australia.

EMBEDDABLE REELS

- The Indigenous Department overview - [here](#).
- Celebrating 25 years of the Indigenous Department - [here](#).

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BACKGROUND

August 2018 marks 25 years since the Indigenous Department at Screen Australia was established, resulting in some of the nation's most beloved films, television shows and documentaries.

Over 160 titles have been funded by the Department including [Redfern Now](#), [Samson & Delilah](#), [Sweet Country](#), [Spear](#), [Toomelah](#), [Little J & Big Cuz](#), [Mystery Road TV Series](#) and numerous documentaries including [We Don't Need a Map](#), and [Black Divaz](#).

Since its inception, the Indigenous Department has provided over \$35m in funding for development, production and talent escalation. The model has been so successful it has recently inspired the [Canada Media Fund](#) to create their own Indigenous Film Fund.

A hallmark of the Department has been to put Indigenous people in control of their own stories, and the Indigenous Department has had a dramatic impact on the visibility of Indigenous characters on screen. As the careers of Indigenous creatives have grown, it has become common for their talents to be seen in projects funded through different streams within Screen Australia, such as Ryan Griffen creating [Cleverman](#), Rachel Perkins directing [Bran Nue Dae](#) and [Jasper Jones](#), Wayne Blair directing [The Sapphires](#) and [Top End Wedding](#), and Leah Purcell being one of the directors on [The Secret Daughter](#).

A 2002 study entitled [Broadcast in Colour](#) found that in 1992 there were very few Indigenous Australians in sustaining roles on Australian TV, and by 1999 there were two. Screen Australia's 2016 study [Seeing Ourselves](#) revealed a remarkable shift, with 5% of main characters being Indigenous, despite making up 3% of the population. The 5% figure matched exactly to the proportion of Indigenous actors in the period, suggesting authentic casting of Indigenous actors in Indigenous roles.