

18th February 2009

SCREEN AUSTRALIA Stage 2 Review of Operations



The Australian Film Institute (AFI) thanks Screen Australia for the opportunity to comment on Screen Australia's Terms of Reference in the areas of Marketing Support & Promotion, and Research and Statistics.

Marketing Support & Promotions, and how they are delivered, are vital aspects of the development of Australian film and television, particularly as audiences respond to competing forms of entertainment.

AFI SUBMISSION

The AFI believes that Screen Australia's objectives in its Marketing Support and Promotion programs should be: -

- (i) to enhance existing national infrastructure that supports and promotes the Australian film and television industry, and actively cultivates audiences, locally and internationally, for Australian screen productions.
- (ii) for this purpose, to assess existing infrastructure and programs and to work constructively to enhance their service delivery and performance;
- (iii) to encourage awareness of and engagement with the Australian screen production industry, particularly by financial and commercial partners who can contribute positively to the recognition and promotion of the industry;
- (iv) to ensure that promotion and support by Screen Australia is not limited only to the films or projects for which it has provided financial or development support;

(v) to support the international promotion of the Australian industry and its national programs and activities, particularly the international recognition of the AFI Awards; and

(vi) by the above means, to foster peer support amongst industry participants for the marketing and promotion of the industry, particularly the recognition of both industry participants and the industry's productions.

Accordingly, and critical to improving the success of our national screen industry, we need well supported, leading organizations exhibiting proven capability at all levels including:

- Experts in their field
- National and international in representation, reach and significant impact
- Integrated well with commercial and private partners
- Integrated well with state and local government
- Integrated well with other effective screen industry organizations, guilds and associations
- Integrated well across screen industry genres, crafts and generations
- Integrated well with audiences & advocates of Australian content
- Ensuring relevance and evolving with the industry they support
- Innovative, collaborative, efficient & effective

AFI ROLE

We consider the AFI as an important partner for Screen Australia to achieving its Marketing Support and Promotion objectives.

The AFI demonstrates all the capabilities referred to above. The AFI is the recognised leader in the promotion of our industry, nationally and internationally, including its productions, performers and practitioners.

While the AFI has recently been formally funded through the Industry and Cultural Development program it is important to note that some of our activities directly support other categories, particularly marketing support for produced and released films, and a new activity to be launched shortly will have a specific focus on supporting films in production.

The AFI is keen to further develop a number of programs which we know have industry support, but which are significantly constrained by lack of funding. We seek Screen Australia's advice, support and assistance to develop these programs and to explore ways in which we can efficiently utilise the AFI's resources to further achieve Screen Australia's national and international marketing objectives.

Established in 1958, 2009 marks the commencement of the 51st year of operations of the AFI. This is a landmark accomplishment. Over this time, the AFI has played a central role in the way the Australian film industry is known and understood and has been crucial to the definition, business and culture of the Australian screen industry.

The AFI has been Australia's foremost screen culture organization, and as a national organization, plays a central role in connecting the industry to its audience, principally through the prestigious annual AFI Awards, and other strategic activities that are currently in development.

SUMMARY OF AFI INDUSTRY SUPPORT AND PROMOTION ACTIVITIES

The core aim of the AFI is to develop an active screen culture in Australia by fostering engagement between the general public and the screen industry, and by promoting Australian film and television both here and abroad.

The AFI facilitates a number of screen culture programs each year to promote Australian film and television production. The most notable of these is the annual AFI Awards, the industry's most prestigious peer assessment, which acknowledge excellence across 44 film and television categories and provide an important showcase for each year's work. The AFI Awards Ceremony has been broadcast nationally on a commercial network since 2005, promoting a very broad slate of film and television programs and the practitioners who create them.

Beyond hosting the industry's "night of nights" the AFI also conducts the following programs and activities:

- AFI Awards National Screenings (Over 250 screenings in 2008)
- Nominations Announcement, Sydney (event & celebration)
- Professional Development programs (worth \$100k in 2008) including
 - o AFI Fellowships
 - o AFI Documentary Trailblazer
 - o Screenwriting career development
 - o Young Actor career development
- Active & extensive engagement with commercial and philanthropic sectors
- Marketing & promotion for Australian productions (expanded program 2009)
- National Publicity for Australian productions (extensive)
- Film competitions to nurture the next generation of film enthusiasts (Launch March 09)
- Digital initiatives

- Case studies of success
- Documenting our production history – AFI Yearbooks, AFI Research Collection and Website Archive
- Strategic review and development
- AFI Membership & Professional Accredited memberships
- Extensive communication strategies to provide industry knowledge and production awareness.

Further details of these activities are provided below.

DETAILS OF AFI ACTIVITIES

Screen culture remains foundational for the AFI. We believe that the many national programs aimed at development and production can only succeed if we can create and build audiences for Australian content and to this end the AFI undertakes a broad and diverse range of marketing and promotional activities to profile our film and television productions, performers and practitioners.

The jewel in the industry's crown, since 2005, the AFI has rebuilt the AFI Awards, our "night of nights", in recognition of the criticality of the Awards as a program that promotes the industry. **The AFI Awards are the only national, commercially broadcast showcase of each year's productions, cast and crew.** It is a significant achievement to secure a national broadcast with a commercial network, 2008 marked the fourth consecutive commercial broadcast of the AFI Awards. Coverage in other media, on other channels and in print, online and on radio is gargantuan in scale. The number of productions entered each year continues to grow, and entries in all film and television categories are at or near record levels. For the 2000 plus industry members who attend across the two nights, the AFI Awards also provide an important opportunity to network, not to mention CELEBRATE achievements we are proud of, among peers and industry supporters, at the end of each calendar year. While it is difficult to measure precisely, there is no doubt that many relationships are both forged and deepened at such distinguished gala occasions.

Due largely to the increased reach of the commercial broadcast, the profile of the AFI Awards continues to grow. The event has evolved materially over the past four years through the engagement of corporate partners who provide the greater part of the event funding.

We believe that to achieve the greatest success for our industry, we must vigorously pursue **a diverse range of partnerships that includes commercial and philanthropic stakeholders to build a broad and inclusive fabric of support.**

L'Oreal, Samsung, Australia Post, Blockbuster, Macquarie Bank, and Suzuki, are among and alongside many industry partners have provided invaluable support to the augmentation of the AFI Awards in recent years.

The AFI Awards broadcast, and the resulting national profiling of our industry they allow, enhances box office and DVD sales, cultural awareness, local screen industry recognition, and the international brand of the Australian industry. As seen in other international markets, **all successful national screen industries grow their national Awards schemes (eg Oscars, BAFTA) to promote their products**, supported of course by local exhibitors and distributors.

For audiences, professional and general AFI members alike, the key event early in the Awards process is the annual AFI Awards Screenings. In recent years, all entered feature films and nominated non-feature films have been screened to AFI members and the general public across seven capital cities and form part of the judging and voting process for the AFI Awards. For both filmmakers (who are invited to introduce their films) and audiences, the AFI Awards Screenings also provide an important and often rare, opportunity to converge.

In October each year the AFI Awards nominations are announcement at a gala event attended by nominees, industry and media. This is a primary component of establishing broad community awareness in the weeks leading to the AFI Awards Ceremonies and generates substantial media attention.

Placed squarely between the practitioners and the public, the AFI performs a role unlike any other organisation in the country.

Beyond our shores, the AFI has more recently placed a greater focus on nurturing connections with our international counterparts, strategic markets and high profile members of the industry living abroad. Through our relationship with comparable organizations abroad we aim to maintain best practices in all our endeavours.

We have increased our active engagement in key international markets. Last year we expanded our relationship with MIPDOC/MIPTV, by selecting and supporting Australia's first Documentary Trailblazer. One of only seven global Trailblazers, Mark Hartley will attend MIPDOC and be honoured for his outstanding achievement in the field of documentary film-making. This

initiative raises the profile of Australian documentary in the largest global marketplace, augmenting opportunities for international sales, collaborations and co-productions. Retaining and nurturing connections with Australian performers and practitioners who currently work and live abroad to the benefit of our local Australian industry, is also an important organisational goal.

2008 marked a powerful milestone for the Institute – its 50th Anniversary.

The AFI maintains awareness of recent and historical achievement, and has continuously evolved and adapted its operations to align with the industry's changing demands and needs. The AFI Yearbooks establish a record of each year's film and television productions.



In addition the AFI imminently anticipates the release of an independent publication which will document the AFI's 50 year history and in doing so reveal a fascinating account of the resurgence of our screen industry.

The AFI brand has few rivals in terms of longevity, equity or engagement within the cultural industries, a notion that is captured in the thought that:

“anyone who is anyone in Australia’s screen industry, in front of or behind a camera, has been associated with the AFI.”

And recently articulated by AFI Patron, Dr George Miller,

“Look through the lists of AFI Award recipients. These awards have proven to be early markers of major global careers. Our stars and stories enjoy far wider recognition around the planet than our flora, fauna, even our most celebrated sporting champions. And none of this would have been possible without the nurturing hand of the Australian Film Institute”

In 2008, in response to shifts in the global industry and feedback from industry stakeholders, the AFI moved to put greater support behind critical parts of our industry, particularly independent and innovative feature filmmakers, and documentary makers.

Technology is helping to drive an emerging, more independent and innovative filmmaking sector that is now blossoming. Almost half of the feature films entered in last years AFI Awards were produced independently of federal or state government support or investment and a similar number have been

made for less than one million dollars (i.e. would be ineligible for the Producer Offset). *The Jammed* and *Men's Group* are notable examples.

The AFI has been able to generate publicity, limited national distribution and of course the opportunity for peer assessed critical appraisal to such independent films. Many of these films would not otherwise have the opportunity for any theatrical exhibition in most capital cities and hence the possibility for discovery, for both filmmakers and audiences, would have been severely limited. For example, subsequent to its AFI screening, *Men's Group* received numerous requests nationally for additional screenings alerting John L. Simpsons to a host of opportunities for this film that are presently being exploited (and now augmented with the support of an AFI Fellowship).

These innovative enterprises need support, and the AFI Awards, and the national AFI Awards Screenings, in addition to the AFI's other programs, go some way toward providing unique assistance. The AFI aims to support practitioners throughout their career spectrum, and has a strong focus on developing these emerging, innovative filmmakers.

The AFI has been fortunate to be able to work with very generous commercial and philanthropic partners to establish very substantial professional development programs. Development support, funded by commercial and philanthropic partners, reached **\$100,000 in 2008 alone** and funded initiatives including the AFI Documentary Trailblazer and AFI Fellowships which assist to showcase Australian screen culture to Australians and the global film and television community.

Inaugural AFI Fellow Nick Barkla, has strongly advanced a number of very interesting projects in the short time since receipt of this opportunity. The L'Oreal Paris AFI Young Actor of 2007, Kodi Smit-McPhee, has had his career accelerated. Similarly Macquarie Bank has robustly supported AFI Screenplay Awards for the past two years. The growth in philanthropic partners for the AFI in recent years has been remarkable and is a testament to the importance a range of community stakeholders place on the success and importance of our screen industry.

We want to grow these programs, to provide our screen practitioners with the best opportunities. In 2009 the AFI, in partnership with one of Australia's most successful companies, will launch a national short film competition to discover and nurture new talent.

AFI Award winners will provide real inspiration for many young people as they attend their local schools and universities and talk directly about their experiences; from starting out to distinguished achievements. Encouragement will be provided for young people to explore new media and tell stories in innovative ways. This initiative recognises and supports the

importance of professional mentoring, to encourage those with great potential, which will culminate in creativity cycles across generations.

The speed at which digital technologies are developing yields a myriad of opportunities for our screen industry. The AFI is exploring ways to provide greater incentives for and adequate promotional support to both creative extensions to more traditional productions and stories produced for new platforms. We are also developing a new screen initiative to support and encourage online marketing strategies that build extensive pre-release awareness and offer unique or novel ancillary opportunities. We support innovative online communications strategies that generate multitudes of connections via both more traditional and more modern forms of social networking.

AFI & SCREEN AUSTRALIA – PARTNERS IN AUDIENCE DEVELOPMENT

As stated in the Draft Statement of Intent of Screen Australia:

“Without an audience there will be no viable screen industry”
(September 2008)

Audience development is central to the work of the AFI. National **commercial AFI Awards broadcasts** in recent years have **showcased our industries finest to millions of Australians**. As such the AFI is a key strategic partner of Screen Australia. The AFI plays a unique and pivotal role in bringing the screen industry and audiences together – a further outstanding example is evidenced in the awarding of the 2008 AFI Fellowship to John L Simpson for his work dedicated to increasing accessibility of independent Australia film to regional and rural Australian audiences.

The AFI, with a growing online promotional infrastructure, partnered with a commercial national broadcaster and extensive coverage in print and radio media, is well positioned to cultivate audiences. We recently upgraded to an online membership management and communications system, incorporating a new website, enhanced e-news capabilities and online voting. **We will shortly unveil a production lifecycle promotion tool that in conjunction with producers, distributors and exhibitors will support productions in all facets of development and progress, from pre-production through theatrical release to downstream achievements with full listings of all opportunities nationally to engage with these productions along the way.**

For all of us to understand audiences better, the AFI advocates for rigorous case studies to be developed around our industry's successes, so such gains can be capitalised upon. Do the current generation let alone the next generation know why films like *Kenny*, *Wolf Creek* and *The Jammed* all ultimately outperformed expectations?

Additional resources for a greater outreach program would allow current programs to be extended to have a greater impact on a range of important audience segments, particularly the next generation of audiences.

Federal support is imperative in order for the AFI to continue building its screen culture programs nationally. As the AFC has previously acknowledged, Federal support in particular will ensure that the AFI Awards process (calls for entry, reviewing and judging, nominations, media and publicity) can be administered with integrity.

There are also opportunities to get more impact from the AFI's programs, in particular, our national commercial broadcasts, national screenings programs, online promotional architecture and professional development programs. Whilst established to support particular objectives, these are dynamic platforms that could be extended to sustain a multiplicity of purposes.

Membership remains fundamental to the AFI and even in these more difficult times (particularly for Australian theatrical content), the AFI has been able to maintain thousands of general and professional accredited members.

An exclusive industry membership was negotiated with the industry Guilds and Associations. Initiated last year, it **enables their members and other professionals more access to participate in AFI programs.** This strategy will be continued and extended as part of ongoing dialogue with Guilds and Associations.

FURTHER DISCUSSIONS WITH SCREEN AUSTRALIA

The next few years appear likely to deliver higher profile screen productions. We hope to be able to seize and lever this opportunity to expand membership and audiences for Australian screen content, and to work with Screen Australia to support its programs.

The AFI is in a strong position to be able to deliver an increased and diverse range of important functions to our screen industry and its audiences. We highly value the many effective relationships the AFI has with key national and international industry associations, guilds, agencies and festivals. Our aim is to extend such valuable integrations, particularly around membership, voting, professional development programs and the AFI web portal, and augment the level of value delivered both to industry and audiences.

We look forward to assisting Screen Australia deliver strongly on the stated objectives, reinvigorating relations between the screen industry and the public, both at home and abroad.

We seek the opportunity to discuss the AFI's role in detail with Screen Australia, and to further comment on Screen Australia Marketing Support and Promotion guidelines as we believe the AFI is perfectly positioned to assist Screen Australia support the success of our industry.

Yours Sincerely,



Damian Trehwella
Chief Executive Officer

