

## **Comment on Screen Australia draft program guidelines from Andy Wilson**

Dear Screen Australia,

At your recent seminar in Hobart Fiona Cameron mentioned Screen Australia's philosophy to invest more money in less projects.

Whilst I understand this position and agree to it's principles somewhat it also puts greater pressure on each of those films being a hit, in an industry where audience point of sale purchasing is very hit and miss.

What I think the industry and the government should really consider is GREATER DIVERSITY in it's content investment.

I also believe the Australian definition of the word CULTURE needs to be altered to fit with the Australia of 21st Century.

On Diversity:

The biggest and most successful film industry in the world, the US, is a prime example of diversity and how it is very successful and secure on a business level. Major studios in the US do not put all of their eggs into one small basket. As we know they produce a large number, broad slate of films (products), from big budget blockbusters through to small scale "Art-house" as such. Contradictory to the less is more principle. So why do we continue to ignore this successful approach in our industry? I think the word CULTURE plays a big part here, however I'll get to that in a moment.

On a business level more is more makes great business sense.

This has been proved to me from my own personal experience on one hand.

I have been working fulltime in the Tasmanian film industry (one of the nations smallest) for over 15 years, the last 9 of those as a self employed business owner. I have taken home a wage suitable to purchase real estate and live a life style most would be envious of, though I am not a millionaire by far, I am wealthy in my own reckoning. With out boast, in terms of the Australian film industry, I am a success story in my own right and I have managed to continue operating year after year by being diverse.

I own a film service company, with a niche market in Tasmania. I produce and service across all segments of the industry; film, tv, documentary, commercial and new media. I have recently opened a new company specifically for creative projects and a motion design company to fill another hole in the market here.

What I am getting at is that through diversity I am able to access a much broader audience who require my services, creating stability to my career. At one moment one

sector may be boiling over with work, whilst the others are simmering or luke warm. The next day that can swing and be completely the opposite, either way on any one day I have a number of "products" in the market place ready to be bought, many eggs in many baskets as such. On an income level it has meant that i have managed to develop my revenue stream from being highly sporadic and inconsistent into one that is now and continues to be consistent.

This philosophy is, I believe, one that our film industry must embrace. By diversifying greatly the films we make, and by making a HIGHER quantity of them we REDUCE the requirement of any one film having to deliver. And because there is a larger amount of films in the market it also INCREASES the possibility of any one film being the smash hit.

In this instance I believe Screen Australia needs to consider itself more like a Hollywood Studio, and structure it's financing so that if any film is a hit it reaps the rewards and therefore makes up for any losses on other films and provides revenue to finance further productions.

This gets me on to CULTURE:

For this debate I want to propose a statement for you to decide whether it's true or false:

That the all films produced in America are expressions of America's national culture.

I believe that this statement is true.

From American Beauty to Jurassic Park, every film produced in America contains within its frames comments on the basics of American beliefs that define their culture and the beliefs they want the world to see them as.

In Australia the industry is pigeon holed into the boring, drab and predictable social comments that we were making films about 50 years ago. They say governments are 15 years behind public opinion, our industry definition is 50 years behind.

The head of the sister organisation to SPAA in Canada once said to me at a chance conversation at a SPAA conference 3 years ago the following and I have never forgotten it.

That Canadian Film Industry does not have a large enough domestic audience to support the cost of the manufacturing of it's product (films). Therefore it is a Export industry.

In Australia we are in the same position, but worse, as we have even less people to buy our product domestically. We MUST be a export market to have any chance of being sustainable and viable. Therefore we must produce content that appeals to the export market and we must find our niche in that market.

What is the USP (Unique Selling Point) of the Australian Film Industry?

I again come back to the philosophy of Less equals More.

1. Unless we change the definition by which we accept the word CULTURE, there is no possibility for producing films for the export market given that our industry relies on government investment. Therefore placing fewer eggs into a slightly more gilded basket will only possibly create content that will appeal primarily to our domestic audience which is not large enough on it's own to create the revenue required to turn investment into profit.

2. The level of investment the government is able to provide will never be able to match it against an american blockbuster production. It would be like putting a Bilby in a boxing ring against King Kong.

3. If it weren't for the cancerous plight of the Tasmanian Devil I would suggest that they are a good example of the type of industry we must become, small, cunning, aggressive and bomb proof. So perhaps a better analogy is the great white, silent, stealthy, deadly, dramatic and roams the world for satisfaction of it's undying hunger. You get my point.

As Fiona said, this is an opportunity to embrace change, so I beseech you to think outside the box that is Australia and really turn our industry around.

DIVERSE, CULTURALLY ADVANCED, GLOBALLY AWARE AND DRAMATIC.  
Now that is collective of inspiring words to a filmmaker!

One final thing and I'll step off the soap box... Consider that you do retain your ambition to fund less projects at a higher scale... do this, as it will enable experienced practitioners to continue to grow, respecting their efforts. However also consider to commit to the risk, I know, such a dirty word risk but that's our industry, commit to the risk of ensuring a larger number of lower priced eggs are hatched each year by emerging artists (supported in the normal ways). Either through your slate funding or also through a fund that sets aside enough money to produce 20 ultra low budget INNOVATIVE films every year (Say \$250K per film). I say innovative because when people are inspired and passionate about a project without full financial opportunity they will become innovative to enable it to be completed on the money they have. I realise there are issues with unions and so on... but what's better? An industry that creates opportunity to many in a structure that is based around increasing the percentage chance of major success and therefore the possibility of a greater revenue return... or an industry that produces opportunities for the few, stifling the energy and ideas of youth, who are more in tune with current trends than the old (I'm sorry but it's true, I'm only 33 and I know I'm already behind the 8 ball in many ways) whilst also reducing the percentage chance for major success because there is less product to choose from?

Thank you for this opportunity to express my opinion, I hope it was a worthwhile read and that there are some things in there that you can bring into your policies.

Best,

Andy Wilson  
Zoot Film Tasmania