

SUBMISSION BY
MEDIA, ENTERTAINMENT & ARTS ALLIANCE
TO
SCREEN AUSTRALIA
REGARDING
SCREEN AUSTRALIA INDUSTRY SUPPORT PROGRAMS
STAGE 2 REVIEW
FEBRUARY 2009



The Media, Entertainment & Arts Alliance

The Media, Entertainment & Arts Alliance (Alliance) is the industrial and professional organisation representing the people who work in Australia's media and entertainment industries. Its membership includes journalists, artists, photographers, performers, symphony orchestra musicians and film, television and performing arts technicians.

The Media, Entertainment & Arts Alliance appreciates the opportunity to make a submission to the Stage 2 Review of Screen Australia's Industry Support Programs.

On the one hand, the Alliance welcomes the openness of the Terms of Reference. It appears that Screen Australia is proposing a clean slate and seeking industry input on the future shape of the organisation.

On the other hand, the Alliance is concerned that the Terms of Reference basically describe the current programs of the former Australian Film Commission and that as such they do not reflect what the organisation has in mind for the newly merged organisation.

All the programs canvassed in the Terms of Reference were developed and implemented within a strong policy framework. It is unfortunate that the policy framework within which these programs sit was not articulated in the Terms of Reference. It is unfortunate that the policy framework within which these programs are to sit in the future was also not articulated.

Research and statistics

The Alliance has been a long-time supporter of the excellent work undertaken by Research and Statistics Unit. Its output has underpinned policy development in the audiovisual sector for two decades.

Get the Picture, the *National Survey of Feature Film and Television Drama Production*, *Documentary Production in Australia*, *Government Funding to Australian Film Agencies* and the *Box Office Report* are timely, easy to use and provide consistent data over time. There is no other source of comparable information. The Australian Bureau of Statistics data is not collected sufficiently regularly for industry needs and it is not as detailed nor as industry specific as the data collated and made freely available by the Research and Statistics Unit. Further, with the ABS now flagging that it will devote less resources, rather than more, to the audiovisual sector the importance of the Unit is thrown into stark relief.

Research papers such as *Flexible Visions*, now in its second edition, provide research to the industry that is unavailable freely anywhere else.

The combined output of the policy unit and the Research and Statistics Unit provides a perspective on the industry that is both historic and up-to-date – what has happened – as well as to what might happen in the future.

The Alliance considers that the Research and Statistics Unit needs to be expanded. Given the amalgamation, the opportunity now exists for it to collect and make available, at the very least, the data that the former Film Finance Corporation used to make available on an irregular basis. For instance, data on which territories and on what platforms Australian titles have sold internationally is invaluable information, not only in respect of measuring performance but in identifying growth trends in overseas markets. Whilst clearly commercial in confidence information regarding sales cannot be released, aggregated data and data showing the range of sales including the average received in individual territories is valuable for individual producers as well as being necessary data to underpin policy formulation.

The Alliance also thinks that in the newly amalgamated organisation there is potentially a fruitful role for the Research and Statistics Unit to undertake in collaboration with Screen Australia's Marketing Branch.

The Alliance is concerned that there has been no mention in any of the reviews thus far of the Policy Unit.

The Alliance considers the retention of a properly resourced policy unit is essential. For the Research and Statistics Unit to work to greatest effect an expansion in its work needs to be underpinned by a strong policy unit that can explore future trends in the audiovisual industry and identify industry information and research needs.

The need has never been greater for a strong policy unit with the audiovisual sector on the cusp of unprecedented change with the growing impact of internet delivery, the transition from analogue to digital, the fracturing of the advertising market, the transition to digital cinema, growing numbers of free trade agreements to which Australia is party, amongst others and now these changes are occurring against the background of the global financial crisis.

Marketing

The programs currently delivered by Screen Australia are valuable for individual producers and for the industry in general, for individual producers heading to festivals and markets and for promoting overseas awareness of the Australian industry.

Missing, however, are any broad strategies designed to foster substantial audience development within Australia.

Mostly also missing is a focus on exhibition within Australia. Strategies need to be developed to foster better relations between producers and exhibitors and to drive access to screens and over and above all else better terms of trade.

Again, a strong policy unit backed by a strong research and statistics unit could inform the planning of the marketing unit. Good research into under accessed markets could assist in determining in which territories, to what end and to what potential return the work of the international cultural program and international promotions might best be directed.

The Alliance is uncertain why the Industry and Cultural Development programs have been brought under the umbrella of the marketing unit. However, the Alliance is strongly supportive of its programs that provide industry assistance and, in particular, the programs of support for industry organisations and mechanisms through which the professional development of industry practitioners can be delivered.

In conclusion, the Alliance assumes that in issuing Terms of Reference that summarise existing programs, Screen Australia is planning to develop a discussion paper following consideration of submissions. The Alliance looks forward to seeing any such discussion paper and to continuing to contribute to the development of a robust amalgamated organisation.