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Wed 18 Feb 2009

Response from Sydney Film Festival to Screen Australia Stage 2 Review

The Sydney Film Festival welcomes the opportunity to contribute to the public consultation process being undertaken by Screen Australia and looks forward to additional consultation on the Stage 2 Review.

Sydney Film Festival - a gateway to the best in film

Sydney Film Festival is Sydney and New South Wales' pre-eminent showcase for contemporary cinema from Australia and around the world. Established in 1954, Sydney Film Festival is a major cultural event on the city's social cultural calendar, one of the world's longest running film festivals and the only Australian film festival to present an international competition that is FIAPF* accredited. We have been extending our reach to audiences in regional centres with the Travelling Film Festival since 1974 with screenings and events in regional New South Wales, Queensland and the Northern Territory.

Audience engagement

The Sydney Film Festival plays an active role in connecting films and the film industry with audiences and provides a context for the discovery, exposure, marketing and promotion of emerging and established filmmakers both locally and internationally. Like many of our peer organisations funded under Screen Australia's Industry and Cultural Development Program, audience and industry development are at the core of our business.

Industry development

Sydney Film Festival has played a vital role in establishing the profiles of some of Australia's greatest filmmakers, and many of our patrons - Gillian Armstrong, Cate Blanchett, Jane Campion, Nicole Kidman, Baz Luhrmann, Dr. George Miller, Phillip Noyce, Sam Neill, and Hugo Weaving - now lend us their support in recognition of the festival's impact on their early careers. Through our screening, industry and awards programs, and working with a range of industry partners, we provide a powerful context in which filmmakers encounter audiences for their work as well as career development and peer acknowledgement opportunities. In turn, the festival and our audiences benefit from the content they produce - lyrical, challenging, imaginative, entertaining, surprising, direct.

Stage 2 Review

In our response to the draft Development and Production Financing guidelines [Fri 14 Nov 2008] we expressed our concern that those guidelines were produced separately from the Marketing and Promotions guidelines, noting that:

"...the policy process embodies the split between content and audiences that the statements of Expectations and Intent otherwise seek to address and risks maintaining the perceived status quo (eg. that Australian films need to connect better and more widely with audiences). Also, this approach does not reflect the priority in the Statement of Expectations that Screen Australia 'review the balance between production, financing, marketing and distribution'. Without all parts of the puzzle, that balance cannot be ascertained."

In other words, we seek robust programs that are aligned in achieving industry and audience growth outcomes across Development, Production, Financing, Marketing, Promotions and Research.

In addition to these considerations, we note that Screen Australia's new structure locates those activities previously funded by the AFC's Industry and Cultural Development program – festivals, awards, conferences, industry guild activities, publications and the Screen Resource Organisations – in the Marketing Support and Promotions Department.

While Events and Activities inherently provide a marketing platform and promotional opportunities for screen product and practitioners, they also deliver on a range of criteria that may not specifically fall under the marketing and promotions rubric. For example, The UK Film Council, in its *UK-Wide Film Festival Strategy*** outlines six core public value indicators for assessing the importance and impact of film festivals:

Market Development Value	The contribution to the UK economy in terms of employment, skills, exports, inward investment and tourism.
Company Development	The contribution to the development of companies within film and related sectors.
Cultural Value for the Individual	Providing pleasure and stimulation from film in all its variety, and thus enriching the life of the nation's individual citizens through film.
Educational Value	Improving, increasing and deepening understanding of the world and its diversity and its history for people of all ages.
Social Value	Improving understanding within and between communities, encouraging participation by all and enriching the life of those communities across the UK.
Global Value	Positively representing UK culture around the world, and building partnerships with other countries.

In addition to describing the purpose, breadth and reach of the events and activities (in this case, film festivals) that the UK Film Council funds, these values also provide the agency with a means to prioritise funding and assess the effectiveness and outputs of its funding program.

Recommendations:

Valuing Industry and Cultural Events and Activities

- Industry and Cultural Events and Activities produce a range of significant outcomes in addition to the marketing and promotion of screen content and practitioners. SFF recommends that Screen Australia give full consideration to the range of public values when establishing its strategy for the future of Event and Activities funding.

Encourage infrastructure partnerships

- Industry and Cultural Events and Activities differ considerably in terms of programs and audiences, but most have a common requirement for base servicing infrastructures (eg. ticketing, customer relations databases, internet/website development, touring). SFF recommends that Screen Australia consider implementing a program that encourages partnerships between Screen Culture Organisations to share the costs of implementing and/or upgrading systems.

Continue Regional Audience Development

- Our Travelling Film Festival, which visits fifteen regional centres in New South Wales, Queensland and the Northern Territory, has experienced considerable audience growth trajectory in the past three years. There is a market and an appetite for diverse cultural programming in these centres.

SFF recommends that regional touring activity continue to be on Screen Australia's funding agenda.

Improve funding efficiencies

- *One-Stop funding*

In the past several years, Sydney Film Festival has gratefully received funding from AFC's Events and Activities Fund, Digital Media Fund, National Touring Fund (Travelling Film Festival) and through the IndiVision workshop and seminars program. SFF strongly recommends that a streamlined funding process is implemented for organisations which satisfy multiple agency programs, minimising the resources spent both within the funded organisation and the agency itself in respectively producing and assessing funding applications and acquittals.

- *Long-term sustainability*

In keeping with the logic of Screen Australia's Enterprise Program (Development, Production and Financing), we strongly recommend that multi-year funding agreements are developed for Screen Culture Organisations with strong track-records that continue to deliver against program indicators. This provides a level of funding certainty that enables SCOs to develop and fulfil long-term program strategies and initiatives.

Virginia Gordon (President, Sydney Film Festival)

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Notes

*FIAPF, the International Federation of Film Producer Associations, is the regulator of international film festivals, and has given SFF accreditation internationally as a 'specialised competitive festival'.

** http://www.ukfilmcouncil.org.uk/media/pdf/e/4/UK_Wide_Film_Festival_Strategy_November_2007.pdf