

Comment on Screen Australia draft program guidelines from Mike Wilcox

Dear Colleagues,

I am writing to propose the program guidelines be amended so that Screen Australia can facilitate a slate of feature films which it alone develops, finances and distributes.

As I understand it, Screen Australia's mission is to develop a vibrant and successful industry to enable the production of culturally significant Australian films which engage audiences worldwide.

However, it seems Screen Australia intends to perpetuate the previous FFC policy requirement of a distribution pre-sale (market attachment) as an essential precondition of its feature film investment participation. This entrenches the mythology that a market attachment underpins the protection of tax payer investment (recoupment and profit), guaranteeing audience interest, the growth of industry infrastructure, and the expression of Australian cultural mores.

The assumption here is there is a correlation between these objectives and a presale marketing attachment. An examination of past history would indicate this is misguided.

Over the past eighteen or so years this policy of marketing attachment has meant that:

COMMERCIALY, our deal making has been imposed on us at the least favourable time in the business cycle (selling off the plan) thereby ensuring the worst possible price and distribution terms; our product only having an outlet through a single, captive non-competitive market. Historically, the FFC and most feature production companies have not recouped, made profit or built financial infrastructure for their businesses this way.

CULTURALLY, in terms of the films we make, distributors determine what gets made, culturally significant or not, and generally the shape of their creative content. It's difficult to conceive of much artistic diversity or cultural considerations in this process. Is it sensible or fair that distributors determine the cultural and commercial fate of our films, when we are dealing with tax payer's money?

INDUSTRY INFRASTRUCTURE did not improve with this market attachment model, and the introduction of a producer's offset was needed to kick start a dormant industry.

WORLDWIDE AUDIENCE ENGAGEMENT with Australian films has not happened, and even domestically our films have at best a mixed reputation.

Therefore, I'm proposing Screen Australia take some measure of responsibility for its diverse objectives and allocate money for a small slate of films which it alone develops, finances and distributes in an effort to achieve its mission. Surely Australia is ready for one small Studio.

Mike Wilcox

Producer 'The Delinquents'

Co-Producer 'Lilian's Story'