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**AUSTRALIAN CAPITAL TERRITORY**

**FILM MAKERS' NETWORK INC.**

**RESPONSE TO**

**DRAFT GUIDELINES - SCREEN AUSTRALIA**

**PROGRAM GUIDELINES - JANUARY TO JUNE 2009**

## INTRODUCTION

The Australia Capital Territory Film Makers' Network supplies its response to Screen Australia as a consequence of the draft for comment '*Screen Australia Program Guidelines – January to June 2009*' document. The Australian Capital Territory Film Makers' Network thanks Screen Australia for the opportunity to provide input toward the development of equitable policies and programs to support the sustainability of the industry and for practitioners across the country.

Our submission is directed toward two main areas:

- Access to programs by practitioners in regional and non-state areas – namely, the Australian Capital Territory; and,
- Policies and programs for emerging and developing practitioners.

## BACKGROUND

The Australian Capital Territory Film Makers' Network Inc. (***The Network***) is an not-for-profit screen-industry development agency, in the Australian Capital Territory, that supports emerging, developing and independent screen practitioners. The Network, launched in 2000, developed to support a clear and critically required void – to provide sustainable ongoing support for the region's screen content producers focusing upon film and television practice – with an emphasis on emerging and developing practitioners. As an adjunct to this, provide access to a sustainable infrastructure hub for independent practitioners to support ongoing production development.

It is the longest standing *ongoing-active* agency, in the ACT, that provides *day-to-day* assistance for practitioners. Not since the early 80s<sup>1</sup> has an agency, in the Australian Capital Territory, provided to screen practitioners accessible day-to-day support by means of advice, resources and production tools for career development and production assistance.

The Filmmakers' Network is now in its eight year of ongoing support for screen industry practitioners. As a core element of the Network's operation, is the support and stimulation of content developers in *film, television, animated, interactive media* oriented productions. This includes supporting strategies to support practitioners take advantage of the growing digital realm to seek to support new screen-based enterprises.

As an adjunct to this, it supports an eclectic segment of independent practitioners who operate outside traditional government funding mechanisms. Through this support the Network provides a hub, and operational centre, for ongoing access to the diversity of needs to create screen productions. It means practitioners have an agency to support knowledge, technical and market access support while providing to them the opportunity to focus upon production development in an unfettered manner through a core infrastructure. It also means that individual producers with quality ideas are not required to invest significant investments into technology to create projects. However, our operation is not currently structured to support financing or the real development of classically in-industry understanding of broadcast/feature production creation.

The Network activities centre upon building, and providing conduits to sustainable **developmental** initiatives (*workshops, briefing sessions, pitching opportunities, industry information circulars, knowledge resources, professional access centre*), **technical**

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<sup>1</sup> In 1983-84 an ACT video club was active. Sue Maslin, a feature film producer, then a resident of the National Capital, was an instrumental proponent of the club, but due to a lack of assistance, closed the organisation. Sue has now produced feature film screen-credits: '*Hunt Angels*,' '*Japanese Story*', '*Irresistible*', '*Road to Nowhere*', and '*An Ordinary Woman*'.

(production facility, open-access video and information resources, equipment and production support advice and tools for projects), together with **human resources** (employment, access to project development institutions<sup>2</sup>, production pitching opportunities<sup>3</sup>, environmental and market analysis and knowledge, with potential employment opportunities). These activities focus efforts toward providing as much exposure to ongoing opportunities for practitioners in the ACT. This is underwritten by providing and supporting practitioners gaining access to business development skills, accessing networking opportunities and supporting access to key personnel to generate relationships and professional outcomes – in addition to seeking to support practitioners seek *screen credits*.

To establish broadcast credited practitioners, the Network previously sort to introduce a broadcaster production Accord with SBS Independent, within the ACT, to address a clear area of market failure – establish broadcast credited producers within the ACT. With the limited funding available through the singular funding body, and door, we viewed the delivery of an Accord – given the stage of development of Territory practitioners – to be fundamental to the regions development. However, due to the ACT Government's lack of support for an Accord initiative, this program was not implemented. This sees the Territory region, given the limited pool of traditionally credited practitioners – within a credits requirement grants system – to be at a significant disadvantage applied to the regions practitioner base.

While we understand this structure, consideration must be provided to regions like the Australian Capital Territory where the credits system will see the bulk, with the exception of one or two practitioners, marginalised. Equity across the different stages of practitioner development – meaning their current stage of their career – entry, emerging, developing, established or sustainable must be a significant consideration in developing policies and programs for Screen Australia to implement nation wide.

## **PRODUCTION DEVELOPMENT ISSUES FACED BY ACT PRACTITIONERS**

Within this mix is the structure of the ACT industry and the unhelpful structures in place. This directly relates to the current 'film office' structure.

Where other Australian States, and the Northern Territory, enjoy established ongoing sector support and representation through *real bona-fide film agencies* - within government<sup>4</sup>, or from government statutory corporations<sup>5</sup> that reflect world-wide and Australian industry practice; some extending over 30 years<sup>6</sup>, no such industry reflective structure operates in the ACT. This is irrespective of the statistical position of the Territory's film and television industries, and the success of its education system in media training which show strong overall market share of screen production, in comparison to other State and Territory jurisdictions. Compared to other Australian screen industry economies, and overseas film structures, it is not a reflective industry economy in relation to the structures that support the industry.

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<sup>2</sup> Once yearly information briefings/seminars with screen project pitching sessions are conducted with Film Australia, SBS, ABC, AFC, ACTF, SPAA, ASDA, and MEAA. Refer to ACT Filmmakers' Network Annual Reports 2001 to 2005.

<sup>3</sup> Pitch sessions to support production development by Territory screen practitioners is conducted with the Australian Broadcasting Corporation, SBS through SBS Independent, the Australian Film Commission, the Australian Children's Television Foundation, the Screen Producer's Association of Australian Holding Redlich feature film pitching competition.

<sup>4</sup> Screen Tasmania, <http://www.screen.tas.gov.au/> and the Northern Territory Film Office, <http://www.ntfilm.com.au/>, are two film offices managed within government. Screen Tasmania, as a within government agency also has a board <http://www.screen.tas.gov.au/about/board.php>.

<sup>5</sup> NSWFTO, FilmVIC, SAFC, PFTC, ScreenWest, and the New Zealand Film Corporation are government instrumentalities all with boards of management.

<sup>6</sup> The Media Resource Centre is the oldest screen development agency. Established by SA Premier Don Dunstan, in the early 1970, it influenced the film development culture in Australia. This coincided with the establishment of the South Australian Film Corporation.

Consequently, ACT practitioners do not have the same equity to the same mechanisms available – unlike practitioners elsewhere. It is a flawed and distorted structure. Consequently, Territory practitioners, including this agency, is unable to access genuine assistance to support industry development of its stakeholder group within the region.

It is with irony, that as a reflection of other National Capitals, that Australia does not have a reflectively structured film office for its capital city.

Some will advocate for the currently operating ACT 'Film Office' Screen ACT and its position within the Australian institutional structures for film and television. We do not. There is clear reasons Australian and overseas jurisdictions run their film support agencies through government or from government enterprises. The Network's stance – consistent with our past support in relation to the National Film and Sound Archives is for an agency that reflects Australian and overseas practice and standard. NOT the current structure. We believe Screen Australia should also advocate for this position to support real access and diversity of Australia's industry. To be silent on this matter we believe, is contrary to Screen Australia's role as the lead Australian agency for building a diverse and sustainable industry, in addition to being contrary to national interest issues. This underpins our advocacy to Screen Australia that sees ACT practitioners significantly disadvantaged in gaining access to funding mechanisms on the same terms as those in other State and Territory jurisdictions.

Currently, a specific interest lobby group runs Screen ACT. We support a Screen ACT that reflects a structure that would provide accountable, fair and equitable opportunities for practitioners across the ACT economy and not one class of practitioner – as we believe is the case with the current structure. We believe our stance is critical to understanding in inequity currently in place within the Australian Capital Territory, in relation to accessing current and future Screen Australian activities and initiatives – from production to producer support.

## **NETWORK – ACHIEVEMENTS**

The Australian Capital Territory Film Makers' Network, as an industry development agency, has provided to the screen industry in the ACT, a diverse range of opportunities, to include – being the only film and television *industry* support agency that has had any active sustainability in the National Capital. As an organisation created *specifically* catering toward the screen-based industry it has actively sort specific tangible professionalization outcomes for the sector. Achievements include<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> Australian Capital Territory Film Makers' Network Annual Reports, 2001/2, 2002/3, 2003/4, 2004/5, 2005/6. All annual reports are submitted, complete, to the ACT Registrar General's Office and are independently financially audited.

- Support the increase of the ACT screen industry economy by increasing the amount of funding submissions to agencies from less than 5 prior before 2000 - to over 50 in the past two years;
- With less than 5 short films created in the National Capital before 2000, over 300 have been created in the last 18 months;
- Support access to production agencies through briefings, information sessions and industry consultations;
- The establishment of a professional development centre to support ongoing access to the community;
- With limited production resources directly supported more than 40 productions – short films and documentary production being created between 2007 and 2008;
- Successfully implement over 150 screen industry development seminars, and workshops, for the development of the ACT Film industry;
- Run international industry symposiums and industry linkages with international organisations in Chile, The United States of America, Canada, France, the United Kingdom and New Zealand;
- Supported during 2007-2008 over 1450 contacts by practitioners seeking support across the range of needs for developing productions.

The Network has created across its eight years of ongoing screen sector activity an increase in production activity in the ACT, but to date this has not translated into generating practitioners who have gained real broadcast credits that would provide to the economy equitable federal funding to the Australian Capital Territory.

If the credits model is to be applied, we believe the whole of the ACT production sector would be discriminated against due to the current stage of the industries development and the lack of genuinely credited practitioners with these credits to support productions in the ACT. This discrimination is based on the significantly small pool of individual broadcaster credited producers fitting the Screen Australia funding criteria. Without opportunities to engage with Screen Australia programs our community – at its current stage of development – will be disenfranchised and removed from any equitable access to support and thus the diversity of production activity in the nation will be hampered. We view this, as should Screen Australia as counter to the interests to which it serves.

Sincerely  
Australian Capital Territory Film Makers' Network Inc.