

Comment on Screen Australia draft program guidelines from Jason Byrne

I am a filmmaker who falls between the definitions of Credentialed and Experienced Australian Producer who, with my current collaborative creative teams, under the new proposals may be judged to qualify for "A successful track record of the producer, writer and director".

Clearly the recent discussions and debate are an opportunity to correct the slow degradation of what we call the Australian film industry.

There seems to be an intransigent problem in our industry where we are slowly killing ourselves. We have watched as the rules and regulations have made the task of making stories in all their forms more and more difficult.

It is sort of like we have lost our self esteem.

Creativity thrives on the vitality of new blood. Film Making starts with the collaboration between writers, directors and producers in many different configurations: experienced with inexperienced, experienced with experienced and inexperienced with inexperienced.

Our industry needs to operate at all levels. I am currently working with mentors on my more ambitious projects and also helping inexperienced teams who are just starting their journey. There is a place for both of these models. Each is different in its nature but both are fundamental to the industry. Both projects will be completed, both will contribute to our screen culture and both will create jobs and both will strive for excellence.

We need a screen body that supports creative relationships in all forms, that supports stories across a broad spectrum of ideas, that supports an industry in similar ways to models we see operating in Europe. The Danes have a good idea of what it all means.

We have certainly lost our way. If we look back over the last decades of uninspiring Australian Cinema, with some obvious exceptions, there is a strong case for a serious rethink. That is where the debate should start.

Let's not mess with the fundamentals we all know are important.

Short Films are the life blood of our industry. It is clear that there is a correlation between established film makers and short film makers across all the departments. Short Film is an essential place to test talent, ideas and to learn how to make film. From Gillian Armstrong and Jane Campion, to Adam Elliot, Clayton Jacobson, Matt Saville, Tony Rogers and Glendyn Ivan we see the journey from Short to Feature or Television in the past and currently evolving.

Lets look at the short film makers over the last ten years that are about to or have already or will make quality Australian Cinema. Glendyn Ivan, Eron Sheehan, Ben Chessell,

Edwin McGill, Matt Saville, Adam Elliot, Sian Davies, David Michod, Nash Edgerton, Julius Avery, Justin Kurzel and the list goes on way beyond these names.

Shorts are an essential seed for the future.

Crawford's and the ABC no longer offer a place to learn so the intrinsic relationship between short film and developing a skill base is even more important. Grips, Gaffas, Sound Recordists, Designers etc etc all often get their start in shorts. What about that as a thought?

Lets not drain feature budgets that are already haemorrhaging under the Rebate System to subsidise the retirement of experienced producers, writers and directors. The most successful films in the last 5 years haven't come from this place. Lets move forward and cultivate a vibrant Australian Industry not afraid to share our sense of humour with the world, display our ability to push the boundaries of genre and make sensitive drama.

Clearly the fact that this Pandora's Box has been opened is an opportunity to improve the system and not to go backwards.

Yours Sincerely.

Jason Byrne