

Submission to the Review of Australian Government Film Funding Support
August 2006

1. A cluster of creative industries is necessary for successful support of film and TV production

AMPAG recommends the Australian Government commits to direct support for non-profit production and development in the creative arts generally as part of its support for screen based industries.

The Review of Film Funding Support should recognise that film and TV receive crucial creative and technical support from the subsidised live performance companies, training institutions and venues.

Artists, designers, directors, actors, musicians and writers as well as the producers and production managers move freely between the live performing arts and recorded and digitally delivered entertainment and arts work.

In a country characterised by a relatively small population over six states and several territories, the cluster of creative industries works together to provide the infrastructure of production skills, support for development of work and the various venues and tours to showcase Australian talent and production. In other words, vibrant live performance across music, drama, dance, opera and circus is an essential element of a lively cultural life which also extends to screen based production and presentation.

The Australia Council has developed a number of case studies of interaction between art forms and media to demonstrate this rich meshing of resources. However it is simply necessary to ask where the film and TV industry would be without NIDA and the theatre and opera companies which nurtured the talent of its graduates through their development as emerging artists.

The major performing arts companies are non-profit, reflecting the commercial reality of presenting innovative live performance in Australia. They have developed a record of efficient management of resources since new funding arrangements were introduced this century and have the ability to track both artistic and financial outcomes from investment. They are a complement to the for-profit screen businesses.

2. Audience development for Australian talent and Australian film and TV production is again interdependent with audience development at major venues, tours and performing arts festivals

Live performance, as a major employer of creative talent is also an integral part of audience development for Australian work. Success of Australian work on stage is a key marker of quality and excitement as the popularity of arts festivals with city and state funders demonstrates.

The audiences for live theatre, music, opera, dance and circus are enriching their own experience of Australian and international work paying far more than cinema and television

audiences for access. They are motivated and committed audiences. It is in the theatre and concert hall that Australian artists hone their skills in direct interaction with audiences. In a similar way American theatre (non-profit and on Broadway) extends the audience for new works and provides creative development for film and TV artists in the immediacy of live performance.

The creative collaborations of artists in subscription seasons and tours are a vital development tool for film and TV as well as the performing arts. The non-profit companies provide an economical base for mentoring and renewal.

3. AMPAG agrees with the suggestions in the Department's discussion paper that film and TV support should aim at a commercial industry, supplemented with support for some areas and genres of programming where this was hard to achieve despite audience interest. The mix of direct subsidy and indirect support should be re-evaluated against these aims.

The rationale for direct support should be based on two criteria which broadly fit with the Australia Council surveys of Australian attitudes towards the arts which show broad support for work of excellence:

- Establishing an infrastructure to provide skills, capacity to develop and present new work and to present the best of Australian creative performance and screen based production to date.
 - Access for audiences everywhere to see and experience the best of creative Australian talent.
4. Levels of investment required: AMPAG does not support policy that allows survival only although it is not commenting on the mix of direct and private investment needed.

The essential reality of support for creative industries is that Australian audiences and audiences for Australian creative work internationally are sophisticated and experienced. They have high expectations that Australian work will be as polished, as challenging and technically complex as work produced in the world's larger markets.

The pressure on film budgets has been very great as subsidy has lagged behind escalating costs in international film making and marketing.

Direct support for infrastructure and development therefore has to be on the basis that the investment allows excellence, not just survival.

This was demonstrated clearly after the new investment in the major performing arts companies which followed the recommendations of the Major Performing Arts Inquiry. Audiences grew consistently in response to the increase in the amount of new work and the quality of Australian production.

5. Current policy issues affecting the Australian Government's ability to achieve its goals through direct support of creative industries.

Over the past couple of years there has been a squeeze in real spending on art form development and in development of Australian artists in the performing arts. This reflects the pressure on the major performing arts companies to achieve financial stability and to build reserves: spending on the core artistic areas has been tightly restrained while the companies face unavoidable cost increases in insurance, finance and marketing, venue costs and transport.

The AMPAG Theatre Survey which documents these trends is attached.

AMPAG fears the result will be seen on stage, and experienced by audiences as a fall off in standards and quality, thereby diminishing the infrastructure for both live performance and film and TV.

It urges the Australian Government to invest further in these companies using the current funding model review process.

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Attachment follows.