

Mr Peter Young  
General Manager  
Film and Digital Content  
Department of Communications, Information Technology and the Arts  
GPO Box 2154  
CANBERRA ACT 2601

11 August 2006

Dear Mr Young,

**Re: 2006 Review of Australian Government Film Funding Support – Submission by Screen Development Australia (SDA)**

Please find attached the submission from Screen Development Australia (SDA) in response to the Review of Australian Government Film Funding Support Issues Paper, July 2006.

Australia's Screen Development Centres make an invaluable contribution to promoting "the development of a sustainable Australian film industry and the creation of a diverse range of quality product". The members of SDA urge the Federal Government to ensure that its review acknowledges and highly values this contribution and considers the positive effect that increased Federal funding to and support for sustained diversity of Screen Development Centres would bring to the growth of the national film industry and culture.

Should you require further information, please do not hesitate to contact Kerry O'Rourke, Chair, SDA, on (07) 3392 2633. We also encourage you to review each Centre's websites.

Yours sincerely,



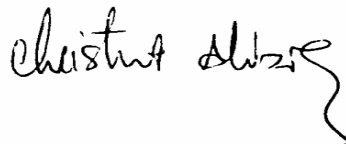
Kerry O'Rourke  
Executive Director, QPIX  
Chair, Screen Development Australia



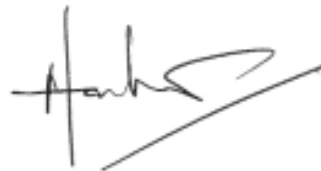
Imogen Selley  
Director, Media Resource Centre



Graeme Sward  
CEO, Film & Television Institute



Christina Alvarez  
General Manager, Metro Screen



Andrew Garton,  
Program Director, Open Channel

## **1. Screen Development Centres and Screen Development Australia (SDA): An Overview**

Central to development of the film industry in Australia are the key access points to the industry – the national network of screen development centres aligned under Screen Development Association, SDA. Located in the capital cities of each mainland state, these centres provide the resources and the professional development and production programs necessary to provide a diverse pathway into the industry for entry-level to mid-career practitioners.

These organisations include QPIX (Qld), Metro Screen (NSW), Open Channel (VIC), Media Resource Centre (SA), and the Film and Television Institute (WA). All centres have been active for over thirty years within their local industries, with the exception of QPIX, which was formed in 1997.

Each organisation is funded through a mix of State and Federal Government funding, with a significant proportion of annual turnover raised through independently earned revenue and corporate support. Total income, including special project funding for the screen development centres in 2005 was approximately \$7m.

The Federal Government through the Australian Film Commission's (AFC) Industry and Cultural Development (ICD) Unit provides triennial funding to the Centres, and project funding through the AFC's Film Development Unit. The AFC has for many years recognised the contribution that these centres collectively make to the national film industry and to our Australian screen culture. The Federal Government's support for the Centres is critical.

In 1999, the screen development centres formalised their network through the establishment of Screen Development Australia (SDA). SDA was set up to enable increased development and delivery of production and exhibition initiatives and awareness of each centre's activities at a national level.

Underpinning SDA is a "many doors" approach to the development of early to mid-career industry practitioners. SDA's aims and objectives are to:

1. Develop a greater number of highly skilled film, video and digital media makers;
2. Ensure equity in access and national delivery of all services and programs, with particular reference to Indigenous, regional, and multicultural communities.
3. Actively engage with new media platforms and lead practitioners and audiences through these developments;
4. Actively engage with the production, economic and aesthetic issues facing the industry; and
5. Develop complementary and diverse pathways into the industry.

It is anticipated that the SDA will be expanded to include centres in Tasmania, the ACT and the NT, which are in formative stages.

## **2. Screen Development Australia's Strategic Position in the Industry**

The Screen Development Centre members of SDA play a key role in furthering the Federal Government's program for film industry development. Each organisation shares the Government's objectives of creating a vibrant, diverse and sustainable Australian industry and skilling practitioners with the artistry and business skills to compete commercially in local and global markets. Each also delivers programs aimed at the "public access, industry support and preservation programs" to which the Issues Paper refers.

The organisations do this through an array of complementary services and programs primarily for entry through to mid-career practitioners.

1. Access to professional development and training through hands-on industry-based experience in our own productions, and placements with commercial productions.
2. Access to a unique package of advisory and technical services including: advice on career pathways, script development, distribution and marketing and technological changes; networking with emerging and advanced industry peers; opportunities to experiment in cutting edge digital content and business creation; and low-cost access to production, post-production, and exhibition facilities.
3. City-based and regional touring cinema programs of independent Australian and International film that would otherwise not be seen by the public or by the aspiring practitioners for whom seeing such work is a vital part of their own development.
4. Innovative and practical approaches to skills development through a range of production initiatives, which has enabled the Centres to generate significant catalogues of ultra-low budget high quality content.
5. Bringing talent to the attention of production companies, and State and Federal agencies.
6. Program delivery to people in multicultural, regional, Indigenous, same-sex attracted communities, and to disenfranchised youth. In this way, the centres enable production and exhibition of otherwise unheard and unseen Australian stories of not just cultural, but frequently also commercial significance.
7. Marketing film and video to national and international festivals, and local (community) and national (terrestrial and digital) broadcasters.
8. Preserving our film and television heritage by maintaining libraries of Centre-produced works, offering accredited and in-house training in cinema projection, and ongoing exhibition of classic Australian film.
9. Advice and training in adapting to and implementing new technologies as they emerge. That said, it should be noted that given the significant and rapid development of technologies and the multiple platforms that have emerged, SDA members have found their limited resources are frustrating their capacity to truly lead young practitioners through these changes.
10. By encouraging and enabling young screen practitioners access to pathways into the industry. It should be noted that in the 1970s, considered the heyday of Australian cinema, emerging practitioners were in their 20s. The emergent talent of today is 16 or younger. Significantly increased investment by the Federal government to enable SDA's members to capture and foster the talent of these young Australians should be a serious consideration.

### 3. Recommendations

In light of the above discussion, SDA makes the following recommendations.

- 3.1 That the contribution of Screen Development Australia's member organisations to the screen industries be clearly understood and valued by the Federal Government. Specifically, the Review must:
  - Formally acknowledge the critical place SDA and its member Screen Development Centres hold in the national screen industry for their development of entry –level through to mid-career practitioners;
  - Formally recognise the critical role played by SDA organisations in the areas of training and professional development, production, exhibition, cultural and community services, new media, and bridging the gap between this sector and the professional industries,
  - Confirm the continued funding of SDA organisations by the Federal Government via the Australian Film Commission (or other equivalent agency);
  - Review the level of Federal Government support to SDA organisations, with a view to increasing funding levels to further support the range and scale of their activities; and
  - Formally consult with SDA about the Review
- 3.2 That in undertaking the process of the Review, the Federal Government ensure that there is minimal disruption to the development of projects and skills, and ensure that there is no loss from the vast pool of expertise that is currently found in its film agencies.
- 3.3 That the Federal Government recognise the need for SDA organisations to establish strong participation in secondary school networks so as to provide immediate entry level opportunity to school leavers, specifically financial support for training and production subsidies to them.
- 3.4 That the Federal Government support transition to digital technologies within each member SDA to ensure compliance with the move to domestic digital content products and industry based digital content production. This would include significant funding support for professional development within the SDA membership, equipment and facilities upgrades and development of internal management and information systems to service the sector through and beyond these important changes.
- 3.5 That the Review address all screen formats. The “film” industry in Australia now provides content for computers, hand-held games, mobile phones, direct market DVDs, cable and digital television, as well as traditional cinema and free-to-air television. As the range of platform increases, it is important to revise the ways we quantify audiences and thereby value the reach and impact of the sector.
- 3.6 That the measure of success for the industry include the expectation that Australians will continue to both produce and see their own stories in their own voices.