

A SUBMISSION TO THE REVIEW OF AUSTRALIAN GOVERNMENT FILM FUNDING SUPPORT.

Glen Crawford.

This will unfortunately be a rushed submission, as I only received it last night (Tuesday) and I'm leaving for an overseas trip on Sunday morning. I will, however, try to assemble my scrambled thoughts on the matter of Australian film, and put them in some sort of logical order. Please forgive spelling and grammatical errors.

Firstly, allow me to introduce myself, and my relevance to the Australian Film Industry.

My name is Glen Crawford, and I'm a screenwriter. That should perhaps read I 'want to be' a screenwriter, as I do not yet have a screen credit as such, although I do have three of my projects in development at this point in time. I have been seriously practicing my screenwriting for some 11 years now, and for several of those years I submitted scripts to various State and AFC screenwriting development rounds.

To be perfectly honest, after several years with not a single response, reply or word of encouragement from the film funding bodies who were supposedly there to 'encourage' and 'develop' scripts and new scriptwriters I, like so many other people I know, simply gave up. I stopped writing, threw all my draft scripts in the recycling bin, and went back to watching TV and playing on the computer at night instead of writing. Fortunately a couple of my scripts were left lying around in producers' hands, and in the last couple of years have come to light. I have been approached by successful producers wanting to make my films, and it looks like I may have my name up on the silver screen after all.

I received a copy of your submission request via the PFTC website, and I rushed to get the information out to people I know, both in the industry and like me, trying to get into the industry. I was astounded at the number of people I discovered who were not aware of the submission request, especially people both highly respected and very successful in the Australian Film Industry who'd not even received a request for a submission.

I was equally appalled at the response I got from some of the most successful people..

"Don't bother, the government doesn't want to know, it'll take two years and nothing will come of it anyway."

Well I'm bothering, so here's my five cents worth.

The Australian Film Industry is a disaster. Most of the people I've got to know over the last 11 years are either now not in the industry at all, or are doing projects outside the industry just to stay afloat until it comes good again at some unknown time in the future.

Most of the anger I see is directed against the government bodies like the AFC and FFC. The consensus of opinion I hear is that neither body would know a decent project if it jumped up and bit them on the bum, and they're both 'boys clubs' where people in the know get funding for films nobody wants to watch anyway.

I think the worst boast I ever heard about the industry came from a producer who'd received millions of dollars in film funding to do what he described as..

“Pissing the government's money up against a wall”

And after having to sit through the film he made from this funding I had to agree he'd done an excellent job of precisely than that with the cash.

What does this government have against commercially viable films? The vast majority of stuff being funded by film funding bodies is crap, pure and simple. Even in the worst days of 10BA we didn't churn out garbage like we do today, although I shouldn't say too much here as there hasn't been a single Aussie film I've been tempted to go and see since 'Strange bedfellows' except for '10 Canoes'. I, like the vast majority of Australian filmgoers, have deserted the cinemas when they show Aussie films.

I have three daughters with children of their own. They constantly complain that there's nothing on at the cinemas they can take the children to, except for in the middle of the school holidays. If they want to take my grandchildren to a film on a normal weekend, forget it. Everything on is either M rated or otherwise unsuitable for children.

Everyone loves to prattle on about 'artistic merit' and 'social significance' but what about good old fashioned entertainment? Is there something wrong with wanting to make people laugh, or feel good about themselves? Why do we have to make gruesome films about druggies living in squats, and other social misfits and failures, when we could be making wonderful movies about kids who get up and have a go, or unlikely heroes, or sportspeople who beat all the odds to succeed.

How about a new film body, set up with the previously unthinkable tenet of creating commercially viable Australian films. Have a board of directors who oversee each potential project, but have them drawn from the industry, not for the arts circle, so the people deciding on which projects to support are people who can see a dollar value in a script. Continue with the artsy-fartsy film stuff by all means, but put some money into a system that's at least going to have a chance of showing a return on the investment. The alternative is to continue giving taxpayers money to the producer I previously quoted.

Put some major focus on script development to begin with. No halfway decent film can be made without a decent script, and the current habit of only dealing with 'credited' screenwriters is only pandering to a closed camp, and not allowing fresh, creative people to get a foot in the door. Employ some top class script editors to go through mountains of first draft scripts and treatments, looking for the good ideas, the fresh approaches, the films that will put bums on seats in cinemas, or maybe be able to be pre-sold to US cable networks. Straight to air films in the US cost \$5 million or so, the same budget we allow for a mainstream feature film.

Get some private funding back into the industry. I know 10BA was rorted, but this time put some serious constraints on the quality of film to be funded by a similar deal. Perhaps the same body working on commercially viable projects could call for private investment funding at say 120% tax rebate, and use the funds they attract to fund the viable films they want to make.

Then put the icing on the cake by declaring any profit made by these films a tax-free profit, or taxed at a 50% reduction on normal tax rates.

We can make great movies, we can make good movies, when we really try we can make brilliant movies, but we make crap movies instead. The government may think the film industry is for lots of arty-type people, while the taxation office thinks anyone in the film industry is basically involved in tax avoidance, but believe you me, there's a lot of hardworking, capable Aussies out there who are dying to make great Aussie films.

All we need is the chance.

Glen Crawford.