

**Australian Writers' Guild**

**Submission to the Department of Communications,  
Information Technology and the Arts**

**Review of Australian Government Film Funding Support**

**JULY 2006**

## **Australian Writers' Guild**

The Australian Writers Guild (AWG) is the peak professional body representing performance writers in Australia.

On behalf of its 2600 members the AWG works to improve professional standards and conditions, to protect and advance creative rights, and to promote the Australian cultural voice in all its diversity, including supporting our members to succeed in the global marketplace.

With affiliations extending across the world AWG is recognised internationally as being the voice of Australian performance writers.

- AWG members are fundamental to the success of the Australian film and television industries.
  
- Without the script and the creators of the script, Australian film and television cease to exist.
  
- In the current climate the majority of Australian performance writers struggle to make a living wage.

## 1. Summary of Key Considerations for Review

- **The AWG fully endorses the Australian Screen Council (ASC) submission**
- This document is an addendum only, and should be considered in conjunction with the AWG's primary submission as part of the ASC.

In addition to the ASC submission the AWG wishes to highlight the following points:

- Ensuring a diversity of production should be at the forefront of the review
- The success and viability of the Australian film industry is inextricably linked to a thriving Australian TV drama sector
- Industry practitioners must be able to make a living wage from Australian TV drama or there can be no sustainable film industry
- The existing drama sub-quotas are the absolute minimum on which Australian TV drama can survive.
- The burden of development falls on writers who are not paid properly during development and can claim no concessions for their investment
- Failure to invest in development can encourage production to begin before optimum development
- Indirect support mechanisms should take development into consideration
- Any restructure of the current funding mechanisms should quarantine direct support as a minimum
- Any restructure should ensure a specified minimum of the agency's budget is directed to the industry client base
- Indirect support mechanisms should prioritise the needs of both producers and private investors
- Indirect support mechanisms should not be limited to a single option, a diversity of production requires a diversity of funding mechanisms
- Costs associated with the relocation of AFTRS should not reduce either the direct or indirect support for industry.

## Response to request for comment

### 1. *What does the Australian film industry need to increase its chances of success and sustainability?*

- **Australia cannot maintain enough creative and technical expertise to support a film industry without a thriving independent TV drama sector**
- Writers, producers, directors, actors and crews must therefore be able to make a living wage in Australian TV drama
- The current volume of outputs in both film and TV is too small to be sustainable
- Quotas are the bedrock of sustaining Australian TV drama
- TV networks are becoming less conscientious about meeting Australian drama quotas
- There are no incentives for TV networks to create Australian drama above quota levels.

### 2. *How can Government objectives best be met?*

- **Quality, and therefore success, is affected by lack of investment in development**
- Film producers are not supported to develop scripts to their full potential before going into production
- TV dramas spend inadequate amounts on development until they are green lit, and then rush into production in an extremely tight timeframe with potential quality issues
- The burden of development falls on writers, often through deferred fees that do not acknowledge the length of time expended
- Writers can claim no concessions for their investment
- Writers are not paid properly during development
- Film and TV development does not attract the R&D tax concessions available to other industries
- 10BA and the RFTO do not support investment in development (and could be encouraging production to begin before optimum development).

### 3. *What balance should be struck between direct and indirect funding?*

- **Direct support is currently at the minimum possible level**
- Any reduction in total direct support would be unacceptable to the industry and a blow to the possibility of reviving a sustainable film and TV industry
- Expenses incurred through moving AFTRS should not take money from direct/indirect support for industry. The industry is unable to benefit from AFTRS while there are no jobs for graduates at the end of their training
- **Indirect support mechanisms should take development into consideration**

4. *What options are there for stimulating growth in private investment?*

- **The AWG supports a predictable and transparent rebate in cooperation with existing mechanisms, in line with the AFC's proposed model**
- **Again, stimulating private investment requires Indirect support mechanisms that take development into consideration**
- Support for development creates a virtuous cycle as quality breeds success and success attracts investment.

5. *What is the most appropriate model for direct Government support?*

- **A broad consultative review is necessary to ensure that a visionary best practice model is achieved**
- **Maintaining a diversity of views should be the priority for determining the provision of direct support, both at policy level and in the funding of individual projects**
- **A specified minimum of the direct funding budget should be directed to the industry client base.**