

Review of Australian Government Film Funding Support: Submission

This submission seeks to highlight two key issues that emerged from a film industry lunch I attended recently with Rod Kemp, and which was hosted by Macquarie Bank. These are my personal views which do not necessarily reflect those of the other attendees.

Tax-based finance mechanisms are critical to the growth of the film and television industry. However, the role of direct government funding will remain important. It is suggested that streamlining the way in which this funding is delivered would further support the growth of the industry and critically, its production companies, contributing to a more commercially viable industry.

Current support mechanisms, which once assisted the development of a commercial production base, now hinder it with respect to both development and production. This is because the industry now has a number of experienced production companies run by producers who have the expertise to develop, finance and produce programs without the involvement of the layers of bureaucracy they currently need to navigate and which results in material inefficiencies. Specifically:

Development

Currently, the majority of government funding for the development of feature film scripts and tv programs is delivered on a project by project basis. This is a time consuming, inefficient process in which creative decisions are made by government bureaucrats. This decision-making would be better made by producers with a track record and who directly interface with the market, making them far better placed to determine which projects will be developed and how.

The AFC already offers modest slate funding to production companies with a track record (via its GDI scheme). However, the majority of its development finance is directed on a project by project basis. There is definitely a place for project by project support with respect to emerging filmmakers. However, it is suggested that the balance be shifted so that far a greater proportion of development funds be devolved to producers via a slate funding mechanism.

Production

There needs to be a distinction made between tv and non-tv production. The mooted super agency makes sense for non-tv

production (feature films, theatrical release documentaries and experimental work or work by emerging filmmakers).

It makes no logical sense, however, for government bureaucracies (whether they be the FFC or Film Australia {FA}) to be involved in the financing of television drama or documentary.

The UK is an excellent model which administers non-tv money via the Film Council, and where TV money is administered directly by the broadcasters and a similar model could be considered for Australia.

Because the vast majority of tv drama and documentary programs commissioned by the ABC and SBS requires the additional support of the FFC or FA, significant hurdles (bureaucratic and editorial) are placed in the direct relationship between broadcaster and producer, creating an inefficient system.

Ideally the funding currently made available to government agencies for tv production, would be administered by the broadcasters themselves in direct negotiation with the program providers, the producers.

It is suggested that money currently made available to the FFC and FA be divided, and quarantined, within SBSi and an ABCi.

With respect to programs commissioned by the commercial networks, which currently also have access to the FFC, an alternative is suggested. To encourage the commercial networks to commission Australian content, they could be offered a rebate on their licence fee to the government

As an alternative to putting tv money under the direct control of the broadcaster, the Canadian system of financial 'envelopes' administered by Telefilm could be considered. Essentially, this envelope of money is triggered when a producer is offered a licence by a broadcaster for a program. The producer then has access to this envelope, which 'enhances' the value of the licence fee in a direct manner involving no third party decision making processes.

This is a brief, but to the point proposal which I would be happy to discuss further.

As a producer working with all government funding agencies, I am happy for the contents of this proposal to be circulated provided its author's name is not disclosed, for obvious reasons.