

National Cultural Policy Submission from Lee Naimo – comedy commissioner, producer and freelance screen creative.

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I am currently employed at Haven't You Done Well Productions, which was founded by comedy group Aunty Donna. In this role I manage the brand "Grouse House", where I produce screen content across all social media platforms, YouTube and our own streaming service "Grouse House TV", as well as live shows, podcasts, merchandise and more. We create comedy wherever our audience is, and between Aunty Donna, Haven't You Done Well Productions and Grouse House we have a combined subscriber/follower base of over 2 million fans.

Prior to this I was the Head of Online and Games at Screen Australia, where I expanded the Online Department over nearly 8 years, supporting thousands of emerging Australian creatives, and established the Games Department both before the dedicated funding in the current National Cultural Policy "Revive", and during it. I was recently contracted by Screen NSW to write a 30-page report examining the Australian online industry, during which I interviewed over 25 Australia screen professionals working in this part of the industry. I feel that I have a unique view of the Australian screen landscape, having worked with and supported so many artists and creatives with both the funding I helped allocate and in my current role, as one of the only dedicated comedy commissioners in Australia.

I would like to address pillars 3, 4 and 5 of the National Cultural Policy Framework in this brief submission, and I appreciate the chance to do so. In regards to the Centrality of the Artist, I believe that Australia has long been a world leader in the creation and distribution of online or direct-to-audience content (demonstrated via consistent international awards, and online projects and companies regularly engaging audiences of millions if not billions of fans around the world), and this was in no small part due to the dedicated Online Funding Department at Screen Australia. Having managed this department for nearly 8 years, I saw how vital it was in giving the next generation of Australia screen creatives not only a voice, but a chance to prove they can manage a budget and work with stakeholders. I understand that a review of Screen Australia is within the remit of this policy, and I urge the government to look hard at the makeup of the agency, and how it can better support this next generation of screen creatives. Within the current setup of Screen Australia, there is no dedicated fund for these direct-to-audience projects and creatives, meaning that emerging teams making online content are forced to compete with established screen production companies making feature films and television series. Ironically, it is these direct-to-audience projects that find a much bigger (and much more loyal) audience than the longer form projects, and yet they are eligible for far less funding. It is my view and the view of many within the industry that they should be treated as their own genre or class of projects when it comes to funding.

Similarly, Screen Australia plays a huge role in the sustainability of screen production companies, so when examining Pillar 4 regarding a Strong Cultural Infrastructure, the

structure of the agency and how funds are allocated is of paramount importance. I worked at the agency long enough to see two iterations of the Enterprise funding come and go, and it is a huge loss that Screen Australia does not currently fund businesses through some form of this fund. When looking at any currently successful “legacy” Australian screen production company, a large part of that success is almost certainly due to them receiving Enterprise support at a vital point in the trajectory. I strongly urge the government to reinstate this funding via Screen Australia, to allocate dedicated funds that remove the pressure from other areas of the agency’s funding, and to ensure that this funding is of an adequate amount to genuinely assist screen businesses. This should include independent videogame production companies, who are making some of the most important artistic and commercial products in the country at this moment, and yet at time of writing are allocated \$3 million of direct federal government funding per year. This is not including the Digital Games Tax Offset, which precludes smaller and medium-sized games production companies, who make up the majority the Australian games landscape (and success stories).

On the subject of offsets, the restrictions within the Producer Offset currently mean that projects must be of a minimum length to qualify. This means that short form projects, including online content and children’s content, do not qualify. While these format restrictions have been addressed in media releases, the legislation has yet to catch up. These simple yet impactful changes should be legislated immediately in order to cease disadvantaging creatives working in these areas.

Finally, Engaging the Audience is an often-overlooked area of the artistic practice, but I believe it should be one of the first areas that creative businesses consider. Currently, the vast majority of screen funding from bodies such as Screen Australia, the ACTF and the state and territory screen agencies is weighted towards feature films and television, yet as audiences fragment and newer generations gravitate towards social media, videogames and other non-linear forms of screen content, funding is increasingly unbalanced. Direct-to-audience projects and companies should not only be eligible for more funding, but there should be dedicated funds allocated to growing these companies who understand where audiences are, and how to reach them. Similarly, these agencies should employ subject matter experts with hands-on creative experience in these fields. Children, teenagers and young adults are no longer watching traditional television, and Australian funding should be fit for purpose to fund content that meets these audiences where they are. Currently, it is not.

I am happy to continue discussing these matters with the Office for the Arts should that be helpful. Thank you,

Lee Naimo