

INTRODUCTION

This is a second submission from me that addresses a separate issue.

My previous submission looks at the role of the ABC, this submission points out funding issues with Screen Australia and creative assessment of arts funding in general.

WHO AM I?

My name is Jonathan J. Sequeira.

I have produced five feature documentaries, three of which I have written, edited and directed.

I am the producer of *The Most Australian Band Ever!*.

It's a feature documentary about a multi-cultural band from Sydney's western suburbs that has won numerous awards worldwide, and received critical praise.

The film received \$10,000 development funding from Screen Australia, but otherwise, received no government funding or support.

The film was funded by myself and a private 'investor'. The inverted commas represent that there is no actual profit.

I have released and distributed these films myself, dealing with cinemas, producing and retailing physical content (DVD/Bluray) and streaming.

Challenges and opportunities - what you would like to see reflected in the next National Cultural Policy

Pillar 4: Strong Cultural Infrastructure Providing support across the spectrum of institutions which sustain our arts, culture and heritage.

Much of funding for the arts in Australia is based around two factors:

1. Industry incentives
2. Competitive assessment based on creative 'worth'

Neither of these enables outsider or risky work.

1. ART VS INDUSTRY

Film industry incentives such as the Producer Offset tax rebate have their place, but are limited to high end productions. They preclude smaller, independent productions with high budgets required to qualify, and administrative costs being prohibitive.

They have their place as they do not require creative assessment, but the reality is that few if any films will get made without other significant investment from industry gatekeepers.

Likewise offsets and incentives for overseas productions. These are essentially reverse-tariff protectionism to protect jobs.

Conclusion: If Government wishes to fund industry, that is fine, but it should do so understanding that this does not meaningfully contribute to art in Australia. It is funding jobs. It must ensure that commercially non-viable art is also funded.

2. COMPETITIVE OR CREATIVE ASSESSMENT

In 2024 Screen Australia abolished the PEP scheme for documentaries.

This rebate involved a payment of 20% of the documentary budget.

It was not creatively assessed and relied on criteria only: budget of \$125,000 or more, an Australian documentary with release of some kind in Australia.

This scheme enabled me to get three documentaries made. None of these films would have been made otherwise. They offered career-starting opportunities to several people involved, they told relevant stories about Australian culture, and they presented Australia to the world. I have had more success getting these films distributed overseas than in Australia.

Screen Australia abolished the PEP scheme because [REDACTED]
[REDACTED] They could not decide if a film was 'worthy'.

None of these three films would have received any funding under the new Screen Australia scheme. Yet they have contributed something important to Australian culture. They have reached an audience and told unknown Australian stories. They have started careers and provided opportunities to people that wouldn't be given a go by industry due to the nature of risk.

I have released two highly praised documentaries since the abolition of the old scheme. They do not qualify for anything from Screen Australia. I would not have released them if I had not been close to completion when Screen Australia abolished the PEP scheme. They went from a break-even proposition to a loss.

With the removal of lower-end criteria-based funding, there is no longer a viable path. I would not make another independent film, and would advise anybody else not to. I know my films would not be funded, and do not trust any Government body to know what is worthwhile or successful. Their track record of picking winners, is to pick losers.

I'll note that since my last film was completed, I have received funding from an unlikely source. DFAT funded a screening in Korea. A government department outside the 'Arts

Industry' recognised the potential where a body like Screen Australia does not. The current system does not work.

Conclusion: Facilitate art with criteria-based assessment, NOT creative assessment.

The grants assessment process creates uncertainty, is detrimental to planning, requires huge amounts of energy be put into applications instead of art. It is demoralising to aspiring artists to see large successful artists receive funding while they are rejected.

As much as is possible, ensure that funding is based on simple criteria – if you meet the criteria, then you qualify for support. This seems like a radical idea, but of course it is the basis for other government support (e.g. Unemployment benefits).

Ensure the smaller, independent end of town is fostered and developed.

The same-size pot is better spent when it is spread across more people.
Even a small amount can make a huge difference to the upcoming artist.

Practical examples:

Rebate to any venue that has live music

Rebate to any cinema that screens an Australian film

These schemes have a much wider reach in encouraging Australian art and culture than deciding whether an individual is worth of funding.

Facilitate art, don't pick and choose artists.