



Screen Vixens

Submission for the National Cultural Policy 2026

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About Screen Vixens

My name is Leonie Marsh and I am a producer and founder of [Screen Vixens](#); a national professional membership of women independent screen producers. I founded Screen Vixens in 2015 to better connect women indie producers to a networked community to share, upskill, learn and mentor each other in an increasingly pressured and isolated role.

Our Central Position

Australian screen culture needs to move from a gatekept funding model toward a sustainable, audience-connected creative ecosystem.

Pillar 1: First Nations First

Screen Vixens supports the continued prioritisation of First Nations storytelling and leadership and calls for genuine investment in sustainable First Nations-owned businesses, meaningful inclusion across the full production pipeline and broader support for genre-diverse and commercially ambitious content that reflects the full complexity of First Nations life today.

- Support continued prioritisation of First Nations storytelling and leadership.

- Ensure pathways for emerging First Nations practitioners are genuinely accessible, not only available to established teams with existing industry relationships.
- Encourage investment models that allow culturally specific stories to reach both local and international audiences.

Ownership, Leadership & Meaningful Inclusion

One of the biggest concerns is whether First Nations practitioners are truly being supported to lead sustainable businesses and own IP, or whether there is a risk of the industry shifting toward increased performative inclusion, box-ticking and surface-level cultural participation.

At times, First Nation Vixens are invited into projects for cultural contribution, while still encountering culturally unsafe practices or not being included meaningfully within leadership and decision-making structures.

Moving Beyond Limited Representations

There is a danger in unintentionally reinforcing outdated ideas of First Nations people as perpetually disadvantaged, disconnected from modernity, or culturally frozen in time.

Too often, First Nations stories are narrowly framed through trauma narratives, social realism, or remote/desert imagery. While these stories are important, they should not become the only stories that are supported or expected.

First Nations people are contemporary, urban, diverse, funny, political, experimental, commercial, spiritual, and globally connected. Our storytelling should reflect the full complexity of who we are as people and communities today.

Expanding the Understanding of First Nations Storytelling

First Nations storytelling is not a genre, nor should it be expected to exist only within arthouse or issue-driven spaces.

We'd love to see stronger encouragement and support for First Nations practitioners exploring horror, sci-fi, action, comedy, fantasy, thriller and other commercial hybrid genres as vehicles for culturally grounded storytelling with global audience potential.

Building Sustainable Companies

There's a need for stronger long-term investment into sustainable First Nations-owned companies, with a greater focus on mentorship, business development, industry integration and long-term infrastructure.

At times, grants and initiatives can feel designed to “open the door once” rather than helping practitioners build lasting companies and ongoing production slates.

A major gap still exists between development support and commercially ambitious production. While there are existing opportunities for emerging creatives and early-stage development, it can be difficult to bridge into:

- meaningful market finance
- international market access
- distribution and sales relationships

We need greater support in the packaging phase and market-facing stages of development. This is an area where many First Nations practitioners struggle to access the same networks, knowledge, and pathways needed to navigate the commercial side of the industry confidently.

Building Below-the-Line Careers

Developing stronger First Nations representation in below-the-line and technical crew roles is incredibly important. Building pathways into departments with mentoring and gaining experience allows stories and cultural materials to be handled with greater sensitivity and understanding. True inclusion should exist throughout the entire production pipeline, not just in front-facing creative roles.

Pillar 2: A Place for Every Story

Screen Vixens calls for a return to bold, distinctly Australian storytelling that leverages our cultural specificity on the world stage, while urgently addressing the structural barriers that prevent independent and emerging creators from accessing funding and building lasting careers.

- As Korea and Scandinavia have successfully demonstrated, local specificity can drive global appeal. Australia would benefit from a return to our grassroots strengths that once defined our international screen brand, via an overarching

screen strategy that prioritises bold, culturally authentic stories with strong international hooks, distinctly Australian voices, characters, humour and landscapes with emotionally resonant, high-concept premises. Films such as *Picnic at Hanging Rock*, *Crocodile Dundee*, *Mad Max*, *Priscilla*, *The Man from Snowy River*, *Strictly Ballroom* and *The Castle* achieved international impact despite sometimes limited budgets.

- Brand Cinema Australia = big cinematic landscapes + emotionally authentic characters + anti-authoritarian spirit + danger/humour in a high-concept premise. How can we reinstall our national filmmaking identity?
- Better support for emerging practitioners, who face major structural barriers despite public commitments to inclusion.
- Funding thresholds and above-the-line rules disadvantage independent filmmakers who often work across multiple creative roles.
- The need for state and federal agencies to engage with and promote all local creators, not only funded productions (this is as simple as ensuring all project inclusion in agency monthly e-news and social media channels)

Independent and emerging creators are often required to prove commercial viability before they are granted institutional support, creating a cycle where only established practitioners can sustainably participate.

Pillar 3: Centrality of the Artist

Screen Vixens urges a fundamental shift toward treating artists as sustainable business owners, with stronger IP protections, minimum rates, entrepreneurial education and policies that retain the financial benefits of Australian creative IP in Australian hands.

- The current ecosystem encourages dependency rather than sustainability.
- Filmmakers increasingly need entrepreneurial, marketing and audience-building skills.
- Shared advertising buys - cinema advertising, bus sides and sheds, mainstream media buys - are affordable if purchased as off-peak/daytime/run of schedule.
- Cinema quotas for Australian films e.g. one screen per cinema complex for set days.
- A nationally co-ordinated or touring **Australian Film Festival** initiative.
- Personal branding, digital literacy and direct audience engagement are now essential career tools.
- Agencies should support business development, marketing education and discoverability strategies.

- Development of producer ecosystems and enterprise model-funded companies, not just single projects - designed to help Australian production companies become sustainable long-term businesses rather than single-project operators.
- Urgent need to create a minimum rate for producers in development.

Actionable Policy Suggestions

- Work with the Department of Industry and collaborate on economic policy to support the arts and give the Australian Cultural Policy real impact for the sector, including long-term sustainability.
- Trial a minimum wage for artists policy and social security for artists - look to Ireland and France for evidence and benefits.
- Protect and strengthen IP, contract and copyright law for artists and independent producers.
- Support the artist as creator, owner and financial beneficiary in trade, copyright law as well as arts policy.
- Look to other IP-driven industries (tech, health) where the importance of an idea and the inventor/creator is recognised more clearly, including in complex commercial agreements with multiple parties.
- Protect artists by requiring a minimum level of ownership and future benefit for original idea owners, artistic creators and above-the-line artistic contributors.
- Defend against anti-competitive agreements and practices in the arts by embedding these protections in arts funding law and policy.
- Fund community/arts law organisations to provide minimum support for artists as they develop, collaborate and commercialise their IP.
- Underpin these rights in contract, copyright and trade law as well as in arts funding guidelines and policy.
- Prioritise and protect Australian production companies in policy, recognising that most Australian producers are independent SMEs.
- Measure and report regularly on ROI and the local retention of profit share on Australian creative IP - regulate against a certain percentage of profits going offshore for identified arts industries.

Digital Discovery & AI Transparency

- SEO and AI-driven discovery are changing how audiences find content.
- Audiences are increasingly searching by emotion/experience rather than titles.
- The rise of filmmaker-led audience building requires new skill sets and support.
- Transparency and Disclosure Standards for AI Use in Creative Works: without transparency, audiences cannot make informed cultural or ethical choices about the media they consume. Possible measures could include mandatory disclosure

of AI-generated or AI-assisted content in film, television, music, publishing and visual arts.

Supporting artists today means supporting not only creative development, but also sustainable career pathways, audience engagement and entrepreneurial capability.

Pillar 4: Strong Cultural Infrastructure

Screen Vixens calls for screen agencies to evolve into genuine ecosystem builders; with more accessible funding thresholds, long-term co-investment in the sector, robust AI and IP protections and formal recognition of the screen arts as a strategic priority area of the Australian economy.

- Screen agencies could act as ecosystem builders, not only funding bodies.
- Government funding should complement market investment, not replace it.
- Screen agencies should promote all Australian films, including independently financed projects.
- More responsive systems are needed for emerging creators.

Specific Reform Ideas

- Lower funding thresholds.
- Lower credit thresholds; the recent Short Film Funding round required a producer with a feature film credit plus a director with 30 minutes of drama credits. This does not serve the emerging sector.
- Strong policies around IP protections for AI. This technology is here to stay and we should be advocating for the best possible outcomes from the outset.
- Reform above-the-line restrictions.
- Centralised national marketing support.
- Industry education and R&D.
- Recognising Cinemas as Essential Cultural Infrastructure: integrating cinemas into cultural and urban planning frameworks, supporting community-owned, council-supported or state-supported cinemas and subsidising ticket prices for Australian films.
- Amend or replicate a tailored version of the National Reconstruction Fund Corporation Act 2023 to identify the Australian arts industries, including the screen sector, as priority areas of the Australian economy.

Refer to: [National Reconstruction Fund Corporation Act 2023](#)

- Invest in a long-term co-investment plan similar to the Medical Science Co-Investment Plan, to: build capability; identify and enhance enablers for growth; remove regulatory, red tape and tax barriers to industry growth; map and measure data for the industry including workforce, capability and ROI; coordinate between levels of government to give strategic, structured support for enhanced commercialisation of Australian creative IP; and look to world-leading policy such as in Korea and France to boost the international competitiveness of Australian arts.

Refer to: [Medical Science Co-Investment Plan](#)

- Collaborate with industry leaders and existing efforts from industry bodies, organisations and researchers to seize this opportunity.

Refer to: [A New Approach: Opportunity to Action — The Big Picture](#)

There is a growing disconnect between public messaging around support for emerging practitioners and the practical accessibility of funding systems.

Pillar 5: Reaching the Audience

Screen Vixens urges structural reform to ensure Australian stories can find and keep their audiences through cinema quotas, coordinated national marketing campaigns, guaranteed theatrical runs and stronger investment in children's content that builds lifelong connection to Australian screen culture.

- Australian films struggle to remain visible in cinemas.
- Australian films struggle to maintain suitable session times for their target market.
- Distribution bottlenecks prevent audience discovery.
- Marketing is fragmented and under-resourced.
- There is no regularity in release dates, other than children's films during school holidays.

Proposed Practical Solutions

- National rolling marketing campaigns by Screen Australia for their funded films.
- International accessibility measures e.g. subtitling. Even within English-speaking Australia, Australian accents and vernacular can be a barrier (*Colin from Accounts* example demonstrates that even English speaking territories need subtitling at times)

- Shared advertising buys - cinema advertising, bus sides and sheds, mainstream media buys - affordable as off-peak/daytime/run of schedule.
- Cinema quotas for Australian films e.g. one screen per cinema complex for set days.
- A nationally co-ordinated or touring Australian Film Festival initiative.
- Reserving some premium cinema release windows or school holiday periods for Australian productions.
- Guaranteeing minimum theatrical runs for qualifying Australian films.
- Incentivising cinemas that actively support local content and regional storytelling.
- Streaming success stories show that audience appetite exists when discoverability improves.
- Young people report that by the time they can get their group together to attend, the film is no longer screening. Guaranteed minimum run lengths would address this directly.

Children's Content

We would also like to see dedicated focus on children's content, which is critical to building the next generation of Australian screen audiences:

- Australian children are a potential lifelong audience. We are losing them to cheaper overseas content and online alternatives. We call for children's quotas for television and separate children's quotas for streaming, on top of current commissioning quotas.
- New Zealand has a strong policy requiring NZ children's content to be as accessible as possible, preventing broadcaster exclusivity. Australia should explore a similar model.
- Children's content builds future adult audiences - kids exposed to and engaged by Australian stories are far more likely to seek out Australian content as adults.
- While Australia does pre-school content well, we lose children from Australian television from age seven onwards. By the time they become adults, many have spent years consuming exclusively overseas content. Why would they choose Australian adult content if they haven't watched Australian content in their younger years?
- Higher-tier funding needs to be given to children's projects that are not broadcaster-supported, to enable the creation of quality Australian content for children wherever they are watching and to empower new creators to take Australian voices to the global market rather than having one broadcaster decide what is and isn't viable based on previous credits alone.

Commercialising Australian Creative Innovation

The global movies and entertainment market was estimated at USD 112.93 billion in 2025 and is projected to reach USD 231.37 billion by 2033, strongly driven by the expansion of digital entertainment and diversified revenue streams.

Key OECD recommendations applicable to the screen sector include:

- Review licensing regimes and reduce regulatory barriers.
- Strengthen laws relating to abuse of dominance, exclusive dealing and access regimes.
- Reduce overlapping and inconsistent regulations across states and territories and promote best practice regulation-making and review.
- Improve the structure of the tax system.

The Australian Arts sector cannot afford to be absent from competition policy reform conversations. As an industry and as a recognised living, breathing cultural asset, it deserves the same recognition as other key industries eg manufacturing, mining and defence, through financial investment and policy.

We also urge the Government to reconsider the future of the Export Market Development Grant (EMDG) for screen producers. Its removal has created a gap in support for producers taking projects to international markets. If reintroduced, it should be delivered equitably rather than on a first-in, best-dressed basis.

Summary: What We'd Like to See Change

- Australian stories cannot build audiences if they disappear from cinemas within weeks or remain invisible within crowded digital platforms.
- There is a growing disconnect between public messaging around support for emerging practitioners and the practical accessibility of funding systems.
- Supporting artists today means supporting not only creative development, but also sustainable career pathways, audience engagement and entrepreneurial capability.
- Independent and emerging creators are often required to prove commercial viability before they are granted institutional support, creating a cycle where only established practitioners can sustainably participate.
- Cinemas should be treated as cultural infrastructure, with support for independents and content obligations for chains.
- The distribution system needs structural support: marketing rebates, P&A funding, coordinated release strategies.

- The Producer Offset should be platform-neutral so filmmakers can choose the best home for their project without a financial penalty.
- Australia needs a dedicated screen export body, modelled on Sounds Australia.
- The funding system should encourage volume and distinctiveness, not just safe bets.
- Audiences need to be treated as active participants in Australian cinema, not passive consumers.

Screen Vixens' Position: Summary

Screen Vixens is a national professional membership of women independent screen producers, founded in 2015 to build community, mentorship and connection across an increasingly pressured and isolated role. Through our collective experience, we have witnessed firsthand the gap between the promise of Australian cultural policy and the day-to-day realities facing independent practitioners - the structural barriers, the inaccessible funding thresholds, the lack of market-facing support and the disappearance of Australian stories from our screens before audiences can find them.

Our submission calls on the new National Cultural Policy to move decisively beyond a gatekept, project-by-project funding model and toward a sustainable, audience-connected creative ecosystem: one that genuinely centres First Nations leadership and IP ownership, removes structural barriers for emerging and independent creators, protects artists' rights in a rapidly changing technological landscape and invests in the infrastructure needed to get Australian stories in front of Australian and international audiences.

Australian screen culture is not only an artistic endeavour, it is an industry with significant economic and cultural export potential that deserves to be treated accordingly, with the same long-term strategic investment and policy commitment afforded to manufacturing, health science and technology. With the right policy settings, it can deliver lasting social, cultural and economic returns for all Australians. But to get there, we need a National Cultural Policy that is bold enough to back the ecosystem our storytellers deserve.

Submitted by Screen Vixens - a professional community of 197 Australian women independent screen producers

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