

National Cultural Policy Submission

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In defense of Australian-ness

You can't be what you can't see may be a cliché but has some relevance when talking about Australian-ness on screen. It may be what critic David Stratton was thinking of when he refused to rate *Romper Stomper* on *The Movie Show* in 1992 not wishing to see the skinhead culture become a trend. Well known screen journalist Sandy George previewed her as yet un-published Currency House Platform Paper titled *Nobody Talks About Australianness on our Screens* at the recent Sydney Film Festival. (Available on the Currency House web site <https://currencyhouse.org.au>)

She makes the very valid point that “the difference between Australian production with foreign elements and foreign production with Australian elements is getting harder to discern, and there is evidence everywhere of economic value taking priority over cultural value..”

As available government finance is significantly outpaced by demand I believe Australian-ness should rate highly as a criteria for determining application success. While quality, creative intent and the usual factors guiding assessment are valid so is what we see of ourselves represented on our screens.

The Australian Communications and Media Authority (ACMA) options paper, *Supporting Australian Stories on our Screens* noted that cultural significance is not easily quantifiable. ‘But it is highly recognisable and supported by the vast majority (76%) of surveyed Australians who are in favour of government support to the sector.’

So we as consumers recognise and support Australian-ness on our screens. But, as Sandy explores, what do we mean?

I believe it means in its fullest extent Australian characters in Australian landscapes performed by Australian actors, about the Australian experience. *10 Canoes** comes to mind. A film like *Gallipoli**, about the Australian experience, cast with many Australians but

shot both in Australia and elsewhere would be slightly lower down a scale. Year of Living Dangerously* is a little lower still as it was adapted by an Australian novel, partly cast by Australians, about an Australian living overseas and set entirely offshore.

And so we go down the Australian-ness scale. There are many examples of varying degrees Australian-ness but I contend that it should be factored highly into funding decisions.

We want to see ourselves and the myriad faces of our fellow Aussies on our screens. We have a wonderfully diverse and fascinating array of stories, faces, landscapes and talents to celebrate and to fund.

Cultural value is high on the agenda when governments fund the creative sector but more and more economic factors like employment and dollars spent on supplies, hotels etc are taking precedence when governments consider funding priorities. I contend that jobs should not trump culture. It is too important that we continue to celebrate who we are, share how we see our many selves and make it a policy that funding includes Australian-ness as a high value criteria when making the very difficult decisions as to what and who gets precious taxpayer dollars.

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* films I worked on