



FilmAustralia leaders in documentary

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information

Film Australia

Film Australia commissions and produces documentaries under its own editorial guidelines in order to create an audiovisual record of Australian life.

Film Australia commissions and produces programs through:

- **National Interest Program (NIP)** – a contract with the Australian Government to devise, produce, distribute and market 100 productions that deal with matters of national interest or illustrate and interpret aspects of Australian life
- **Making History Initiative** – a 10-part series of high-quality documentaries on Australia's history.

COMMUNITY SERVICES – MORE THAN PRODUCTION

Film Australia provides support to the independent production sector through both production activity and its community services – library, marketing and distribution, site and facilities. Film Australia receives Community Service Obligation (CSO) funding to maintain and upgrade these services.

CSO funding has allowed Film Australia to increase filmmaker access to its library of Commonwealth-owned titles and stills through a program of preservation, detailed cataloguing and digitisation. It has introduced an online stock library database with more than 1,000 preview clips, and established Film Australia Digital Learning, a free online resource for teachers based on materials managed by Film Australia's Film Library.

The improvements have allowed Film Australia to invest its assets in the industry through schemes like zero-fee licensing, facilities discounts and the pilot of a business incubator program for documentary producers (Hothouse).

Film Australia distributes its management costs across all business units and CSO business units are required to achieve revenue targets to meet part of the costs of operation.

FILM AUSTRALIA'S COMMITMENT TO GROWTH

Film Australia is committed to increasing production opportunities for documentary makers, and introduced a strategy to drive production growth in 2004-05.

The strategy for growth is based on identifying management and operational savings, increasing revenue from goods and services and using Film Australia's unique market position to raise third-party finance.

The results have far surpassed target and are forecast to reach a total of \$12.3 million in production expenditure in 2007-08, up from \$4.9 million in 2003-04, doubling Film Australia's annual direct investment in four years. The total direct (cash) investment in the independent sector for documentary production through the NIP is now almost \$10 million plus another \$2.5 million for Making History Initiative.

In the same four-year period, funding to Film Australia for NIP and CSO activity has had limited increases of approximately \$150,000 or 1.5 per cent a year.

MINIMISING OVERHEADS

A key part of Film Australia's commitment to grow production opportunities is to minimise the take up of government resources for management costs.

Additional production, including the Making History Initiative, has been absorbed with minimal increase to production unit costs and no increase to Film Australia's management overheads. Film Australia has decreased staff numbers and reduced management costs by over \$1 million over the course of the current contract.

Since 2005-06 above the line fees for contract producers, directors and writers have increased by at least 10 per cent.

PRODUCTION MODELS

On average over 85 per cent of NIP productions (which can be worth between \$7.2 to over \$10 million a year) are made on subcontract in association with independent filmmakers that may or may not use Film Australia facilities.

The other 10-15 per cent are programs that are based out of Film Australia's Lindfield site by contract production teams (directors, producers, writers, editors, etc.) employed on short-term contracts. Some of these focus on projects that meet particular cultural, development or strategic needs including mentoring and development of younger filmmakers or the quick turnaround demands of a specific television on-air date.

These in the past have been termed 'in house' production to distinguish them from subcontracted productions, although Film Australia does not employ permanent in house production staff.

ROLE OF THE EXECUTIVE PRODUCER

All Film Australia projects are made under supervision of an executive producer.

Executive producers work with filmmakers to foster their ideas. They assist in identifying writers, producers and directors to form the best creative team, and provide other resources and contacts to support the project. They will negotiate with broadcasters under Film Australia's established output deals.

In the production process the executive producer will make editorial input to ensure the project is meeting all of its objectives.

This can be a challenging process for some filmmakers as it submits their project to rigorous scrutiny. For many this process of review and engagement with an executive producer is a positive creative experience resulting in an improved documentary. Throughout the development and production process, Film Australia aims to promote an environment of fairness and treat all people with dignity and respect.

DEVELOPMENT

Film Australia both initiates program ideas and works with independent filmmakers to realise their projects under the NIP. It will invest its own development funds into projects. Independent producers are able to submit proposals for documentaries throughout the year via an online proposal system at: www.filmaust.com.au/production.

Film Australia considers proposals at all stages of development, not just fully realised scripts or treatments. Filmmakers are not required to secure presales or other market attachment.

COMMISSIONING

All proposals for production must meet the editorial guidelines for the NIP and are assessed against the overall shape of the development and production slate, available funds, market potential, co-production opportunities as well as the creative vision and experience of the proposed team.

The editorial guidelines for the NIP were comprehensively reviewed in 2004 to improve communication with filmmakers, broadcasters and government and established four key priority areas for content: history, science, the arts and contemporary life.

Recommendations for production are reviewed and endorsed by the editorial committee. Investment decisions of over \$300,000 are made by the Film Australia Board, after consideration of the recommendation of the CEO and editorial committee.

NATIONAL ACTIVITY

Film Australia has its main offices in Sydney (at Lindfield), an additional production office in Melbourne and works with filmmakers across the country.

Over the current contract period about 63 per cent of production is in New South Wales, 20 per cent in Victoria, 9 per cent in Western Australia and the remainder across all of the other states, which is broadly in line with the national spread of documentary production activity in Australia.

AUDIENCE REACH

Film Australia aims to engage and connect with audiences and is required to achieve the widest possible distribution and exhibition of NIP productions. Therefore the intended audience is a key consideration for commissioning.

As free-to-air television remains the dominant market for Australian documentary, the majority of NIP productions are made for television broadcast and, before commissioning, Film Australia will seek a broadcaster pre-sale.

Film Australia also manages the promotion of all NIP and Making History Initiative documentaries, in consultation with the broadcaster and filmmakers. This includes development of media kit (including publicity stills) and campaigns for broadcasts, coordinating awards and festival entries and any associated advertising and events.

In 2006-07 over 15 million Australians viewed documentaries made by Film Australia with independent producers through first-run broadcasts alone.

DIGITAL DEVELOPMENTS

Audiences also reach Film Australia programs through non-broadcast channels, such as festivals and cinema release, DVD and online services, digital and subscription TV.

Film Australia targets 15 per cent of the NIP contract to non-broadcast delivery, and has initiated projects for online, digital TV and mobile delivery, including co-productions with ABC, SBS and the National Film Board of Canada. Since 2003 it has been developing online education resources, and launched Film Australia Digital Learning in 2007, which provides over 1,000 digital education assets for teachers.

In 2006 Film Australia began to scope how digital production and distribution will impact Australian documentary makers. The aim is to develop and communicate a strategic approach to position Australian documentary in the digital environment.

Workshops were held at Film Australia (with managers, staff and board) and with industry members, plus representatives of state and federal agencies at AIDC.

Later this year Film Australia will continue this dialogue (Documentary 2012) with stakeholders through papers, workshops and launch of online resource capturing case studies and other opportunities for documentary making in a digital age.

CONSULTATION WITH INDUSTRY

In 2006 Film Australia reviewed its processes for engagement with the documentary sector and established a consultative group that includes a representative from both SPAA and ADG and a range of other documentary makers from across Australia.

The first meeting was in February 2007 to discuss revisions to Film Australia's Terms of Trade; a second meeting is planned for early September 2007, and the intention is to have ongoing meetings every six months.

Following the first meeting, Film Australia offered to change its development buyout terms and extend the producers' revenue stream from five to 10 years (whereby filmmakers access 20 per cent share of net income). Other issues raised included copyright, allowable overheads, producer and director fees, which will be addressed at the September meeting. ▲