



## FilmAustralia leaders in documentary

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# Stanley Hawes Award

ACCEPTANCE SPEECH BY DAVID BRADBURY, 2008

It's an honour to receive this award. I am proud to accept the Stanley Hawes award in the tradition of a long line of filmmakers before me who have followed their passion and made documentaries that have inspired people, films that stay in our memory bank and are now a part of the nation's cultural treasury. I thank Film Australia for honouring me with this award in acknowledgement of my passion for my craft. I've got a Mastercard debt due next week that I was fretting about so I know where the generous sum of \$5,000 is going to!

A brief moment of reflection and inspiration if I may before we all get back to the deal making and pushing glossy film proposal's under toilet cubicle doors in our desperation to reach retreating and harassed commissioning editors.

It's thirty years ago this year since I met the late Neil Davis and started my interviews with him for Frontline – a news cameraman's view of the Vietnam war which Neil filmed for 11 long years.

It was my first film and I made it with the passion that some of you in this room will make your first film with. I'd been rejected in my application to enter the Australian Film and TV school and had never made a film before. In those days there was no hope of a presale to the ABC or the commercial networks. That didn't deter me. Nor should rejection at this conference put off you aspiring younger talent here today if you get reject after reject. Go out and make the film you want to make. The technology is there. All you need - but most lack - is the determination and a good idea. Three years after I started Frontline I was walking down the red carpet with the glitterati of Hollywood when Frontline was nominated for an Academy Award. It can be done.

My next film was about Wilfred Burchett, the controversial left wing Australian journalist. Burchett was regarded as a traitor by many in the Australia of the 1950's, 60's and 70's simply because he chose to speak unpalatable truths about wars we chose to fight in Asia; wars where we sent a small token force of troops to side with our rich and powerful ally to give a false legitimacy so the imperial power could rip off the locals natural resources and sustain the American dream and laidback lifestyle that had never been, never will again be seen or enjoyed by a small percentage of us on planet Earth. Climate change is here to stay and its only going to get much more messy from hereon in.

Wilfred's only crime? He wrote home truths about what he saw happening in the world outside our protected borders which were written off as radical ideas because they hurt the sensitivities of conservative and powerful elites who ran Australia.

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speech



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Sound familiar? A bit like being a political filmmaker in John Howard's Australia for the last decade?

Don't worry, I'm watching the clock and I've only got another 18 docos to trawl through to make my point. So relax! Take a big deep breath and treat yourself to a Byron Bay Ommmm!

It's not getting any easier to survive as an independent documentary filmmaker committed to making films that have a social justice, political or environmental flavour. They will deny it till the cows come home but in Australia our public broadcasters have joined the ranks of their commercial free to air programming colleagues to fill our screens too often with dross and lifestyle oriented documentaries that are geared to please the audience and often appeal to the widest common denominator rather than what is in the national interest. If they do tackle the burning questions of our time, too often its as a cheap buy in from overseas rather than allowing an Australian voice to apply an Australian perspective to what should trouble us as a nation.

Our public broadcasters and commissioning editors need to be reminded that they are indeed 'our' public broadcasters because they've forgotten that it is 'our ABC,' its OUR taxes that make SBSIndependent a reality.

Too often in the last decade, the public broadcasters have applied the commercial imperative "Will it rate its socks off..?" rather than does this documentary have genuine merit and is it worth funding because it tackles the hard issues that the audience needs to hear about...even if it will not please our political leaders in Canberra. Docos about refugee incarceration centres which are a stain on our recent history. I too spare a thought and moment of respect for the passing of my colleague Pip Starr who despite rejection after rejection from the public broadcasters pushed the boundaries with what he filmed that they didn't want to know about. His footage of the breakout/breakin at Woomera detention centre is some of the most gripping footage I've ever seen. Why wasn't Pipp given an easier go and respect for his commitment to humanity while he was alive?

Where are the docos that challenge the spin doctoring of the mining industry that an expansion of uranium mining and going nuclear is the way to go, the answer to climate change that Chernobyl and Three Mile Island are technological dinosaurs of the past. Docos about why our young people in numbers never seen before are necking themselves and mental illness in materially rich but spiritually poor teenage Australia is reaching frightening proportions as the booze and drug industries aided by slick advertisers target young teenage girls in particular, but the whole of society with poisonous and brain damaging levels of alcohol.



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We as a nation rightly gave a collective sigh of relief last week with Prime Minister Kevin's Rudd's historical "We are genuinely Sorry" speech. We could start to hold our heads high again as a people in acknowledging our wrongs to the original people and owners of this land.

Let's be reminded that for 11 long years in our own field of documentary filmmaking the quasi fascist rule of John Howard slowly but surely swept over this land like a virus infecting the collective mind of our nation and broadcasters so reliant on Canberra for their funding and survival. Too often the commissioning editors at both the ABC and SBS have capitulated to the mindset of their political masters and used ratings as the yardstick for what they funded a moral excuse to self censor what they funded and were prepared to show.

I can only hope that with this new government our public broadcasters will find their way again and start funding some of the films that for the last decade have gathered dust in the top drawer of some of Australia's finest filmmakers.

FEBRUARY 2008

speech