

To whom it may concern,  
I wish to put forward my concerns regarding the current state of the Australian Film Industry.

I work in Post Production as an editor, mostly in documentary.

For many years now budgets have been unrealistically low, with every producer approaching me saying "I do not have much money but...".

Editing a documentary is a highly technical as well as creative job. It is generally slow process where the script is created in the cutting room, it takes many weeks to do, and most current budgets cannot easily sustain the time that is needed, so there is constant pressure to either work very fast, work long hours without extra pay, or for less money.

The standard film industry week is 50 hours a week, for which I earn less than a plumber working 38 hours. My hourly rate is around \$45.00 maximum, but often productions do not have sufficient to cover that. There is an expectation that long hours will be worked unpaid, or at best pro-rata.

As a freelance worker, I need to be available to suit the schedule of the production, and so there are many occasions where I will be approached for a job, but it may overlap with the end of another job, so I miss out. This can lead to months out of work as the next job can be a long time coming.

The industry is very fragile, with many people working for favours on projects they are passionate about.

For example, my work this year has been appallingly paid. I have just recently worked on a very worthwhile production that has gained much interest, but the producer has only been able to raise a small amount of money through crowd funding, so I have edited it for 3 months full time, ending up earning around \$500 per week , or around \$10.00 per hour.

The job that followed, paid a modest rate, then the company that engaged the director reduced the payment they were making part way into the film, had a dispute with the director then cancelled the contract, so payment for work done, did not come through.

Meanwhile I have been squeezing in another job in order to earn enough money to try to pay my mortgage in Sydney and feed my three children, as well as pay to maintain and update editing equipment that is essential for my work.

People believe that the film industry is glamorous and well paid and there are many schools popping up to cater for those who wish to join the Industry. They do not all teach to the professional standard of Schools such as AFTRS & Swinburne, and there are a lot of young people who come into the industry who are willing to work for free who have little experience.

This creates an expectation that all will work for low rates, but the problem is that there is a large attrition rate among both the new players as well as many experienced hands as payment on many jobs is not providing a living wage. This means skill are being lost at the top end.

This is especially apparent for the freelance worker who no longer earns enough on one job to tide over to the next comfortably. Freelance film-makers do not easily manage to take holidays away as they need to be available when a job comes up, and it is often unaffordable as well. It is well known that Industry workers are stressed when they are working because they are so busy, and stressed when they are not, because they do not know when the next job is coming up, or how much they will earn.

This has not always been the case. The budget situation has declined in the last ten years as it seems funding to the Australian Film industry has been reduced. In documentary the Producer's offset is very low, not encouraging development of good independent documentaries which are thought provoking, that will have a long life and sufficiently represent the Australian context.

Instead there is the development of quick, formula driven programs such as reality TV which copy heavily from overseas production models and exist only to sell advertising and turn over a quick dollar to large production companies making large profits which are not returned to the workers in terms of sustainable wages or conditions.

Yours,  
Fiona Strain

Fiona Strain ASE

Editor  
Spike Films P/L