

FILM INQUIRY  
Submission No. 45.....

**House of Representatives**  
Standing Committee On Communications, Information  
Technology & The Arts  
Inquiry into Australia's Film and Electronic Games Industries  
launched.



From SPAA/ASDA Documentary Council  
SADC  
June 2003

### **SPAA/ASDA Documentary Council (SADC)**

SPAA and ASDA formed the joint SPAA/ASDA Documentary Council (SADC) to provide an effective independent voice for the Documentary sector to Government and the wider industry.

SADC comprises of two representatives from each organisation. It is documentary producers and directors working together to promote documentary production and distribution.

SADC supports the sentiments expressed by both SPAA and ASDA in their respective submissions. The purpose of this supplementary submission is to highlight the particular industry area of interest to SADC, the documentary sector.

SADC defines documentary as being a program that is creative treatment of actuality other than a news or current affairs, sports coverage, magazine, infotainment, or light entertainment program.

#### **Contact**

If you require any further information, please contact SADC's Policy Officer, Bethwyn Serow on 02 9360 8988.

## Executive Summary

Australian documentaries offer Australian interpretations and insight into world and local events. They stimulate and provide resources for national and international thought and debate.

The need for content regulation in Free-To Air broadcasting and the call for content regulation in PAY TV is primarily in recognition that market forces alone fail to protect our cultural heritage. Australia is faced with the challenge of ensuring that within the new multi channel, multi platform environment, new Australian content, and in particular Australian documentaries continue to be created and to be accessed.

It is not the technology that underpins the strength of the documentary sector. Its strength lies in the generation of ideas, content development and production which in turn is affected by the availability and accessibility of outlets for dissemination of the material.

The main area in which government can ensure the continued stability and potential growth of the documentary sector is to ensure Australian content continues be included in the overall content mix for each and every new technology, associated with program broadcast or delivery.

SADC therefore recommends introduction of content expenditure regulation to PAY TV as a first step towards preserving and extending Australian content options and delivery mechanisms.

SADC recommends government planning and policy support the broad principle that all new delivery mechanisms carry a minimum level of Australian content.

SADC recognises there are many benefits associated with the introduction of new production and communication technologies. However funding initiatives to encourage or underpin establishment of new technology within Australia must be considered as a separate initiative and area of industry support to funding channels already established for content creation.

### **The economic social and cultural benefits of Australian documentaries.**

Documentaries contribute to the exploration, observation and evaluation of our society in a vital and significant way. Australian documentaries contain a unique characteristic, Australian stories and realities that offer Australian interpretations and insight into world and local events. Well developed, crafted documentaries stimulate and provide resources for national and international thought and debate.

Australian made documentaries provide an understanding of ourselves, strengthens our society and our confidence and place in the world.

Australian documentaries record Australian cultural heritage as well as contribute to it. They in turn form significant archival resources for future understanding and examination.

Traditionally accessed through free-to air television and purchased videos, Australian documentaries also have the potential to be accessed through Pay TV, video libraries, video retail, theatrical distribution, broadband and reversioned for online interactive use.

The Australian documentary sector is respected internationally yet the reality is that much of the activity takes place within a cottage industry model. Key local funding sources for Australian documentaries are: Film Finance Corporation Ltd, Film Australia, Australian Film Commission, state film agencies and licence fees from broadcasters. SBS and ABC are the main broadcasters of Australian made documentaries.

The documentary sector in Australia has a symbiotic relationship with other production sectors of the industry. Documentary budgets are generally too small in themselves to lead the demand for the introduction or establishment of new technologies however the introduction of new technologies to service other production areas, eg television commercial production or features has a flow on benefit for documentaries.

While the documentary industry can and does benefit from the introduction of new technologies that bring about production efficiencies and in some cases increase technical abilities, it is not the technology that underpins the strength of the documentary sector, **It's strength** lies in the generation of ideas, content development and production which in turn is affected by the availability of outlets for dissemination of the material.

### **Future opportunities for growth of these industries, including through the application of advanced digital technologies, online interactively and broadband.**

#### **Program Distribution and Multi Platforms**

As new distribution and delivery platforms continue to develop, the broadcasting landscape and viewing patterns of audiences will change. Audiences access material in an increasing variety of ways. It is inevitable in the years to come Free-to Air will loose some audience share to these other platforms. The main area in which government can ensure the continued stability and potential growth of the documentary sector is to ensure

Australian content continues to be included in the overall content mix for each and every new technology, associated with program broadcast or delivery.

Free-to air and Pay TV are broadcasters and as such are governed by the Broadcasting Act. The objectives of the Broadcasting Services Act (BSA) include:

- the promotion and availability of a diverse range of radio and television services offering entertainment, education and information - s.3(a)
- the provision of a regulatory environment to facilitate the development of a broadcasting industry in Australia that is efficient, competitive and responsive to audience needs – s.3(b)
- the promotion of the role of broadcasting services in developing and reflecting a sense of Australian identity, character and cultural diversity - s.3(e)
- the provision of high quality and innovative programming by providers of broadcasting services - s.3(f)

Self regulation has failed to see the development of a suitable level of Australian documentary material being screened on PAY TV. SADC therefore recommends introduction of content expenditure regulation to PAY TV as a first step towards preserving and extending Australian content options and delivery mechanisms.

SADC recommends that as an initial step, the same (expenditure) requirements that currently apply to subscription drama channels should in future apply to subscription documentary channels, i.e. initially 10%, rising to 15% after three years and 20% after five years.

(Page 5 )SADC SUBMISSION TO THE AUSTRALIAN BROADCASTING AUTHORITY'S REVIEW OF AUSTRALIAN CONTENT ON SUBSCRIPTION TELEVISION 7 FEB 2003

SADC full submission is attached as Appendix A of this report

### **Public Broadcasters**

SADC supported the ABC's 2003 submission to government for additional funding under ABC-i initiative. Additional funding was not granted. ABC has now cut its only two digital channels Fly and ABC Kids. It is regrettable that the nation's leading public broadcaster has essentially retreated from active engagement in digital television. Given ABC & SBS are major avenues for documentary content their engagement into new content formats and delivery mechanisms is seen as a long term benefit to our sector. To maximise exploitation of programming possibilities that this new technology allows it is desirable that both public and private broadcaster engage in digital broadcasting.

SADC recommends adequate funding to ABC and SBS to support development of digital broadcasting channels without negatively impacting on ABC's ability to service its core local content broadcasting responsibilities and objectives.

### **Online Interactivity**

SADC observes there are a small number of documentaries being reversioned for online interactive or CD Rom. Documentary production budgets are tighter than ever before, Online and interactive initiatives require special additional or alternative funding than that currently available for broadcast documentaries.

**Whether any changes should be made to existing government support programs to ensure they are aligned with the future opportunities and trends in these industries.**

SADC recognises that any new initiatives that enhance our technical abilities and increase access for the public and the industry to these technologies has many benefits, SADC recognises there are many benefits associated with the introduction of new production and communication technologies. However funding initiatives to encourage or underpin establishment of new technology within Australia must be considered as a separate initiative and area of industry support to funding channels already established for content creation. They should not detract resources or commitment away from content development or production.

Communication and broadcast technology has the ability to significantly strengthen the cultural resources of our national if the introduction and development of these new technological are done in hand with consideration of the their relationship to local content.

It is important for the stability and to promote growth of the documentary industry that access to and broadcast of Australian documentaries be supported. In the case of PAY TV SADC calls for increased content regulation, in the case of ABC that adequate funds allow public broadcasters to evolve and engage with the new digital technologies as they emerge. The aims as stated above of the Broadcasting Act are equally desirable, though less clearly definable in the newer delivery areas of broadband and online interactive sites.

SADC recommends government planning and policy support the broad principle that all new delivery mechanisms carry a minimum level of Australian content

As a nation we run the threat of the unique perspective and insight of our distinctive voice being swamped by the ever increasing information gateways. New technology is increasingly controlled by private enterprise yet the need for regulation in Free-To Air and the call for content regulation in PAY TV is primarily in recognition that market forces alone fail to protect our cultural heritage. Australia is faced with the challenge of ensuring that within this multi channel, multi platform environment new Australian content, and in particular Australian documentaries continue to be created and to be accessed.

Appendix A & B forwarded to committee via email