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Luhrmann hails budget boost for film "stunning"

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Film Writer

FROM the set of his epic film *Australia*, director Baz Luhrmann described the boost for the film industry in the budget as extraordinary.

Driving back from meetings with film-makers, the Village Roadshow managing director Graham Burke said it was "much bigger" than the Division 10BA tax incentives that fuelled an Australian film-making boom in the 1980s.

All round the industry there was marvelling at the scale of the Federal Government's support, which includes a 40 per cent rebate for feature films, a higher incentive to attract offshore production (including post-production and digital visual effects) and the amalgamation of the Film Finance Corporation, Australian Film Commission and Film Australia into the Australian Screen Authority.

Luhrmann, who is in the second week of an expected six-month shoot for *Australia*, said he had been discussing industry support with the Government for more than a year.

"It's an extraordinary result really and probably a very historical moment," he said. "The one big idea that they responded to and have completely embraced is that around the globe, we're in an extraordinary and unique situation when it comes to the cinematic arts.

"Other than America, we have the highest numbers of leading actors and directors in the world."

Luhrmann said *Australia*, which has a budget capped at \$US100 million, would only benefit from the new rebate for expenditure after July 1 but believed there were great benefits for the industry.

"We'll be halfway through before we qualify," he said. "I hope that before I wrap on *Australia*, there's at least two other large-scale Australian films imagined by Australians, directed by Australians and



CaptionPhoto:

starring Australians and that that pattern is ongoing for us."

Graham Burke, who is involved in production both through Village Roadshow and the Warner-Roadshow joint venture, said it was "a wonderful moment" in the history of the Australian film industry.

"Australia has a natural skill in this area and for the Government to be encouraging that in a way that is commercial, because it will cause private investment to sit beside the

government money, is just stunning."

Burke said there were "a whole bunch of films" that would be made because of the new 40 per cent rebate and the increased 15 per cent location rebate for off-shore production.

"There'll be a lot of action, a lot of really good movies getting made, including by our company."

The chief executive of the Film Finance Corporation, Brian Rosen, expected the new authority would have about \$100 million from the combined budgets of the three agencies to spend on production, the national interest documentary program, development and the marketing of Australian films both domestically and internationally.

He believes the rebate will "step up" the scale of films that will be made in this country. It could increase the total value of production, including offshore films, by at least 30 per cent within four years.

"The specialty divisions [of the Hollywood studios] will be looking very strongly to get into relationships with film-makers here. I think it will also strongly encourage those directors working overseas to come back and make stories here."

Among the few critics was Simon Whipp from the Media Entertainment and Arts Alliance, who said the abolition of 10BA would do little to attract private investment.

"We support the rebates but without 10BA the effectiveness of the new system will be significantly reduced," he said.