



Australian Government



**Submission to the  
Senate Standing Committee on Foreign  
Affairs, Defence and Trade**

**Inquiry into the nature and conduct of  
Australia's public diplomacy**

**Australian Film Commission  
January 2007**

## 1. Introduction

The Australian Film Commission is an Australian Government agency, operating as part of the Commonwealth Film Program to ensure the creation, preservation and availability of Australian audiovisual content.

The AFC enriches Australia's national identity by supporting the development of film, television and interactive media projects and their creators, promoting the availability of Australian content to Australian audiences and cultivating and assisting the development and appreciation of Australian screen culture, locally and internationally. Through the National Film and Sound Archive, the AFC collects, documents, preserves and provides access to Australia's screen and sound heritage.

As the major collector and analyst of data about the industry, the AFC leads opinion, outlook and policy about the audiovisual industries and screen content in Australia.

The AFC welcomes the invitation from the Senate Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs, Defence and Trade to provide a submission on the Inquiry into the nature and conduct of Australia's public diplomacy, dated 21 November 2006.

The Standing Committee provides guidance as to the nature of public diplomacy and provides the following definitions:

“Promot[ing] the national interest and national security ... through understanding, informing and influencing foreign publics and broadening dialogues ...”

“Work aiming to inform and engage individuals and organisations overseas in order to improve understanding of and influence for [Australia] in a manner consistent with government medium and long terms goals”

“Government sponsored programs intended to inform or influence public opinion in other countries.”

Given these guiding definitions, the AFC believes that its work in developing and supporting the Australian audiovisual industry generally, as well as its work in delivering specific international programs such as the Embassy Roadshow, produce significant public diplomacy outcomes. The AFC's work in this regard assists in informing and influencing foreign public perception of Australia, its culture and people.

The AFC notes in the Committee's letter to agencies that there is no requirement to address the full terms of reference, only those that are of relevance to each organisation. Accordingly, the AFC advises that its submission is confined to paragraphs (a) and (b) of the terms of reference.

## 2. The public diplomacy role of Australia's audiovisual output

Audiovisual material in the form of film, television and digital content is the most readily accessible, popular and effective medium for providing an insight into a nation's landscape, its lifestyle and its political, social and cultural environments. Film, television and digital content has played a central role in establishing an international profile for Australia and its culture. The screen content industries are of national importance. Australian film and television programs are ambassadors for this country around the world.

Films such as *Crocodile Dundee*, *Muriel's Wedding*, *Strictly Ballroom*, *Priscilla*, *Queen of the Desert*, *Shine*, *Babe*, *The Man from Snowy River* and television programs such as *Neighbours*, *Home & Away*, *Kath & Kim* and *McLeod's Daughters* have resonated with audiences around the world increasing international exposure to Australian culture and values and raising awareness of the depth and diversity of Australian society worldwide. For example, the serial drama, *Home and Away*, which is in its 18th year, continues to attract over two million British viewers daily and is seen throughout the world in places as diverse as Belgium, France, Norway, Italy, Kenya, Denmark, Iceland, Israel, Lithuania, Norway, Poland, Serbia, South Africa, Sweden, France, Fiji, Hong Kong, Mongolia, Pakistan, Vietnam, Singapore and Thailand. *Crocodile Dundee* was seen by millions of international cinema-goers with the film becoming the second highest grossing film in the US in 1986 and grossing over US\$328 million worldwide. More recently the Australian animation *Happy Feet* has been hugely popular earning over US\$350 million worldwide.

Filmmakers, actors, directors and other audiovisual practitioners developed and supported by the Commonwealth film program make an important contribution to the positive image of Australia through their work in Australia and abroad. Internationally renowned film and television stars including Nicole Kidman, Cate Blanchett, Hugh Jackman, Toni Collette, Russell Crowe, Kylie Minogue, Naomi Watts and Eric Bana and practitioners such as Peter Weir, Gillian Armstrong, George Miller, Phillip Noyce and Baz Luhrmann are significant ambassadors for Australia. One of Australia's most recognised stars, Nicole Kidman, was officially appointed as a goodwill ambassador to the United Nations Development Fund for Women while Naomi Watts was recently appointed Special Representative for the Joint United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS. All of these international stars obtained their early feature film and television experience on government-assisted locally funded and produced film and television.

Establishing an international profile through screen culture also delivers tangible economic benefits for Australia through tourism and trade.

Australia's unique culture, people and landscapes are projected to the world through Australian screen content. In this way the support provided by the government to develop and produce audiovisual product, as well as promote this work locally and internationally, inform and influence the opinion of Australia as a possible tourist destination. International tourists are not only

attracted to the unique geography that they see depicted in Australian film, but are also motivated to visit Australia to engage in our culture and experience our national character. Images of the outback (*Mad Max*, *Japanese Story*, *Sunday Too Far Away*), stories of Australian suburban and beach culture (*The Castle*, *Home & Away*) and the portrayal of our history (*Gallipoli*), indigenous culture (*Ten Canoes*) and unique sense of humour (*The Dish*, *Muriel's Wedding*) are fundamental to the projection of Australia to the world. It is these representations of Australia that are often the impetus for overseas visitors to make the decision to visit Australia. For example, the phenomenal success of *Crocodile Dundee* across the world and the use of its star Paul Hogan to represent Australia in its tourism commercials led to an almost doubling of US tourists to Australia,<sup>1</sup> in what came to be known as the “*Crocodile Dundee* effect.” Up to 100 people per day in summer continue to visit Pine Oak Street, which doubles as Ramsay Street in *Neighbours*.<sup>2</sup> This impact has been recognised by governments around the world with nations such as the US, UK and New Zealand – most famously with its campaign centred on *The Lord of the Rings* – actively promoting tourism dividends through audiovisual policy.

The sale of Australian audiovisual content internationally is also of great economic benefit. Since 2001 Australia has received over half a billion dollars in royalty earnings relating to the export of locally produced audiovisual content. The Australian film industry, comprised of well-trained technical staff and high-level production facilities, has for many years attracted foreign production. Foreign production is not only a source of foreign revenue, but has provided Australian filmmakers and technicians the opportunities to hone and develop their skills, talents that they are then able to export overseas. The many Australians working in Hollywood, as well as Europe and Asia, both in front of and behind the camera, is extensive and disproportionate to the relative size of the Australian industry. These Australians function as ambassadors for our nation in developing international public opinion on Australia, assisting the government's medium and long-term economic goals.

### **3. The AFC's engagement with current public diplomacy programs**

#### ***The AICC and the Embassy Roadshow***

The AFC has primarily engaged with Australia's public diplomacy objectives through its membership of the Australia International Cultural Council (AICC). The AICC was established in 1998 and is comprised of leaders from government, the arts community and business who have a common interest in more effective international promotion of Australian arts and culture.

The AICC's goal is to project:

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<sup>1</sup> Vincent Canby, “‘Crocodile Dundee’: All-Australian Film, All-American Values”, *New York Times*, November 16, 1986: “Since he began making his tourism spots in January, 1984, the number of Americans travelling to Australia has nearly doubled, from 160,000 in 1984 to a projected figure of between 240,000 and 280,000 this year.”

<sup>2</sup> *The Film and Television Industry in Victoria*, Report of the Victorian Film & Television Industry Task Force, September 2000 p25

... an image of Australia as a stable, sophisticated, tolerant nation with a rich and diverse culture. Recognition of Australia's unique cultural heritage – a product of our history and geography – can influence both directly and indirectly how others see us as a nation, and how others relate to us on the international stage.<sup>3</sup>

The AICC's strategy is to project a broad and diverse image of Australia which advances our foreign and trade policy interests and promotes and enhances the export of Australian cultural products. The AICC aims to promote Australia and its cultural assets in a coordinated, targeted and innovative way. The AFC's support for, and development of, Australian screen culture and its promotion overseas is consistent with the AICC's promotion of Australia's broader cultural output of theatre, dance, music, visual arts, indigenous arts, literature, cultural heritage and conservation services, and national collecting institutions.

Through the AICC, the AFC contributes to the promotion of Australia internationally primarily through the AFC Embassy Roadshow. Now in its seventh year, the Embassy Roadshow facilitates the showcasing of recent Australian films in 'mini festivals' through Australian Embassies overseas. A collection of recent Australian feature films and shorts across a range of genres and subject matter are managed by the AFC in Canberra and offered to Embassies for use in film events in their territory. Individual diplomatic posts make a selection from the collection and receive advice and guidance in how to set up an Australian film event. Designed to increase awareness and appreciation of Australian films and film culture internationally, the Embassy Roadshow is popular with both diplomatic posts and audiences around the world.

In 2005/06, Australian posts in 19 countries hosted 24 separate Embassy Roadshow film festivals. Over the past five years, up to 116 Australian posts have held festivals, with audiences of over 173,000. In 2005/06, the Roadshow visited countries as diverse as Vietnam, South Africa and Canada. The Australian Embassy in Beijing sponsored numerous film festivals throughout China. Venues included the capital Beijing as well as Shanghai, Guangzhou, Qingdao, Tianjin, Wuhan, and Xian. A screening event was also held in Ulaanbaatar, Mongolia. Approximately 10,000 people attended these events across China. Another event held with the support of the Australian Embassy in Beijing was the Embassy Roadshow for film students in April 2006.

Through AICC assistance, the AFC has also supported a number of other international activities including Australian film festivals, tours, and gifts. These are outlined in **Appendix A**.

The AFC's Embassy Roadshow received a funding increase under the Governments 2004 election policy 'A World Class Australian Film Industry'. This additional funding was used to expand the breadth of the Roadshow to

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<sup>3</sup> <http://www.dfat.gov.au/aicc/index.html>

establish Australian film festivals in key countries where there are identified diplomatic and cultural outcomes. The AFC considers the work of the Embassy Roadshow and the AICC as critical to supporting Australia's profile internationally and supports the continuation of this important program.

### ***Australian Film Festivals and Events***

Under the government's 'World Class Australian Film Industry' policy, the AFC was provided with further funding over three years to support the creation of Australian film festivals and events internationally. This funding has enabled an Australian Film Festival in Tokyo; six festivals in India and screenings in the UK, Italy, the USA, Canada and Japan. Full details of these are at **Appendix B**. This funding is due to lapse in 2007/08. The AFC understands that this funding (as well as the additional funding to the expanded Embassy Roadshow) is being reviewed and considered as part of the 2006/07 Review of Australian Government Film Funding Support. The AFC supports the continuation of this successful and popular program and looks forward to an expansion of it to support the dual aims of developing Australian screen culture and assisting the strategic and diplomatic interests of Australia.

### ***Further AFC initiatives supporting Australia's public diplomacy program***

The AFC undertakes a significant number of initiatives aimed at establishing and maintaining strong international networks and relationships. These are necessary for accessing the international investment opportunities and new audiences through overseas distribution channels that are essential for cultivating a healthy film industry and promoting Australian film culture.

In order to ensure investment and global distribution of Australian productions, participation and exposure at key international festival events and markets is essential. Success overseas assists Australian producers to achieve commercial viability. Australian film producers need to be active internationally through international festivals, sales and distribution overseas as well as co-productions.

To support Australia's commercial and business interests, the AFC participates in a range of international film and television festivals. The AFC's involvement in these festivals serves to maintain the high profile of the Australian audiovisual industry overseas. The AFC operates stands or offices at key international markets and festivals in order to support Australian practitioners while overseas. The AFC also stages special networking events for Australian practitioners, often in conjunction with international bodies. In 2005/06, the AFC participated in the two key television markets MIPCOM and Mip-TV held in Cannes, the European Film Market and Berlin International Film Festival, Hong Kong FILMART, the Cannes Film Festival and the Rotterdam Lab.

Furthermore, the AFC provides financial assistance to assist individual film practitioners to attend international overseas markets and festivals to assist in their professional development, with the ancillary benefit of raising the profile

of Australian film practitioners overseas.

Under the International Co-Production Program, Australia is party to co-production treaties with Canada, Germany, Ireland, Israel, Italy and the UK as well as memoranda of understanding with France and New Zealand. Film or television programs approved as official co-productions are regarded as a national production in each of the co-producing countries, allowing producers from both countries to access benefits or programs of assistance usually only available for local productions. The International Co-Production Program was established to facilitate cultural and creative exchange between the co-production countries, allow the co-production countries to share the risk and cost of productions and to increase the output of high-quality productions. The AFC regularly meets with representatives of the AFC's counterparts in each nation, to progress issues arising from the co-production treaties.

Through the National Film and Sound Archive the AFC participates in a range of international audiovisual conferences, international events and meetings which provide an opportunity for the AFC to present its experience of archiving practice to the international community and to keep itself up to date with archiving practices. In 2005/06, such events included the International Federation of Film Archives Annual Conference (Sao Paolo), the Association of Moving Image Archivists Annual Conference (Texas), the International Broadcast Convention (Amsterdam), the Association of European Archives Annual Conference (Venice) and the 8th Indigenous Film Makers Conference (Oaxaca).

Finally, the AFC provides assistance to the government on diplomatic matters as required. For example, the AFC has assisted the Prime Minister's office by selecting and sourcing a list of iconic Australian films that will be provided as gifts to the twenty national leaders from the Asia Pacific region that will be in attendance at the next Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation summit to be held in Sydney late 2007.

#### **4. Conclusion**

The work undertaken by the AFC internationally to support Australia's national interest and diplomatic aims – through its funding programs, industry support, screen cultural activities and work with the AICC – is both significant and effective.

Film, television and digital media can be a powerful and influential ambassador for the nation. The AFC believes that through continuing and strengthening support for the Australian film, television and digital content industries, an opportunity exists to boost Australia's national interests by influencing international opinion of Australia's people and culture, and Australia as a trading partner and tourist destination. Australia's ability to project and deliver an evolving, diverse and positive image of Australia to the world depends fundamentally upon the continuation of a thriving, viable and sustainable film, television and digital content industries. It is important to keep in mind that while Government support for Australia's audiovisual

industries exists primarily to deliver cultural outcomes to Australian audiences, there comes with it the concomitant benefits of expressing and projecting Australia's identity to the world. In so doing the Australian screen industries make a significant contribution to the fulfilment of the Government's public diplomacy imperatives. This important outcome requires recognition and continuing support.



## **Appendix A: AFC activities through the AICC**

### ***oZmosis Australian Arts Festival***

In 2005, *Raise the Red Curtain* a retrospective of Baz Luhrmann's work was presented as part of the oZmosis Australian Arts Festival showcasing contemporary Australian arts and design in Singapore.

### ***ancient\*future: Australian Film Focus***

In 2003, four features and six shorts were presented over 3 days as part of the ancient\*future: Australian Film Focus Metropolitan Museum of Photography.

### ***Nicolas Baudin Bi-centenary gift***

As part of the celebrations to commemorate the bi-centenary of Nicolas Baudin's exploration of Australia, in 2002 the Australian government, through the AICC gifted sixteen indigenous films to the French Government. The films were administered by the CNC in Paris and screened for a week there then toured to other centres throughout France.

### ***Australia OutFront, New York***

In October 2002, The AFC curated an Indigenous film festival highlighting films produced by Australian Indigenous filmmakers in partnership with the Asia Society for its major focus on Australia during October 2002.

### ***Berlin Film Festival***

As part of Arts Australia Berlin 02, a year long focus on Australian arts in Berlin, the Australian Film Commission partnered with The Arsenal Cinema to present a week-long film festival, 21st Century Oz: New Australian Film.

### ***Shanghai Film Event***

A program of seven Australian documentary films screened as part of Celebrate Australia 2002 at the 4th China Shanghai International Arts Festival

### ***Brooklyn Academy of Music Next Wave Festival in New York***

The prestigious Brooklyn Academy of Music Next Wave Festival in New York featured in 2001 a month long focus on Australian arts and culture including the Australian Film Festival titled "Killing the Koala". The program involved more than forty contemporary Australian films (including *Sweetie*, *Oscar and Lucinda*, *Chopper*, *The Boys*, *The Adventures of Priscilla*, *Queen of the Desert*, *Dead Heart*, *Feeling Sexy*, *Floating Life*, *Looking for Alibrandi* and *Muriel's Wedding*) chosen to provide an alternative, realistic portrayal of urban Australia.

### ***Berlin ethnofilmfest***

In 2001 the Museen Dahlen partnered with the AFC and presented a major Indigenous film festival as the focus of ethnofilmfest over ten days, followed by a

selection of the films touring to Munich and Frankfurt .

***CHOGM 2001***

Four Australian films were presented at the 2001 CHOGM conference in Brisbane

## **Appendix B: AFC international activities**

### ***2006 The Year of Exchange - Australian Film Festival in Tokyo***

The AFC partnered with the National Film Centre in Tokyo, the Australian Embassy in Tokyo, The Australia-Japan Foundation and sponsors Chevron Australia Pty Ltd to present the Australian Film Festival in Tokyo. Over the course of a month, 23 feature films and 17 shorts were shown, ranging from classics to recent releases including a special screening of Raymond Longford's restored 1906 classic *The Sentimental Bloke*, as well as a Japanese premiere screening of *Ten Canoes*.

### ***The Australian Film Festival, London March 2006***

The AFC supported the prestigious 12th London Australian Film Festival (2 –12 March 2006) at the London Barbican Centre. A program of the most popular films of the festival then toured to seven cities including Dublin, Manchester, Sheffield, Edinburgh, Cambridge, Mold and Belfast.

### ***North American tour of The Sentimental Bloke 2006***

The AFC toured *The Sentimental Bloke* through North America, screening at the prestigious Telluride International Film Festival as well as Berkeley, Washington, Montreal and Rochester. North American audiences were introduced to Australia's rich screen culture through the most widely acclaimed surviving Australian silent film, as well as the National Film and Sound Archive role in the restoration, collection and preservation of Australia's audiovisual history.

### ***AusArts INDIA in 2005-06***

As part of the AICC Australia-India Council AusArts India festival, the AFC, in conjunction with DFAT, The Australian-India Council and Film & Casting Temple Pty Ltd, presented programs of recent and older Australian films to several major Indian Film Festivals, including the 2005 Pune Film Festival, and in 2005 and 2006, the Kolkota Film Festival, the International Film Festival of India in Goa and the Chennai Film Festival and in 2006 the Mumbai International Festival of Shorts and Documentaries and in 2007 the Mumbai Arts Festival.

### ***Screenings of The Sentimental Bloke***

The AFC supported the screening of *The Sentimental Bloke* at the London International Film Festival and the Pordenone Silent Film Festival in 2005