

Money has always been hard to come by, but it was usually available for those intrepid souls willing to share their ideas with partners around the globe. In the spirit of 'many hands make the budget lighter,' filmmakers have turned to coproductions as a way of realizing their cinematic aspirations. To judge the opportunities available to filmmakers, realscreen makes stops in Australia, Canada, France, Germany, the UK and the US to see how changes locally might affect productions internationally

Australia Under (re)construction

by: Lindsay Gibb

With the Liberal party's announcement of the Screen Support Package in May 2007 and the Australian Labor Party being voted into office last November, much is set to change in the Australian media sector.

As reported in the September/October issue of *realscreen*, Australia's previous government announced the merger of three of its major federal film funding bodies: The Australian Film Commission (AFC); Film Australia (FA); and the Film Finance Corporation (FFC); thereby forming the Australian Screen Authority. According to a government report, the FFC invested AU\$87.9 million (US\$77.2 million) into 67 new productions in 2004 and 2005, 37 of which were documentaries. Up until now the FFC was predominantly responsible for production investment, while the AFC delivered development and production funding through various programs. Film Australia, meanwhile, has been responsible for producing television documentaries and educational programs of interest to Australians.

Bundled together, the new body is meant to administer a 20% producer rebate off of qualifying production expenditure on documentaries with budgets over \$250,000 (\$220,000). Though the merger and the rebate were announced by the outgoing Liberal government, Labor's position is to go through with these changes. In fact, the rebate has already gone into effect, according to FA's CEO Daryl Karp.

Also included in the changes is the plan to separate out the National Film and Sound Archive into a stand-alone entity, though the legislation ordering this (and the merger) had yet to be passed at press time. "There is a mechanism," says Karp of the continuing role of the FA, "in terms of the instructions we've been given to date, to ensure that the less commercial programs that are in the national interest continue to get support."

Australia holds official coproduction treaties with Canada, China, Germany, Ireland, Israel, Italy, Northern Ireland and the UK, and holds a Memoranda of Understanding (MOU) with France and New Zealand. An MOU is much like a treaty except that the agreement was signed by government agencies (such as the Australian Film Commission and the New Zealand Film Commission) rather than the governments of the two countries. Coproductions can access the same funding as pure Australian productions.

Australian state film and television offices also offer regional location assistance funds that encourage a minimum production spend in their area. Film Victoria, for example, offers up to \$100,000 (\$88,000) to productions that shoot for at least five days in the region, while the New South Wales Film and Television office offers the same amount but requires at least one week or more with at least 50% of below-the-line production costs spent in NSW. Check the funds' individual websites for complete rebate and incentive details.

When selling to the Australian television industry, a policy worth noting is the Australian Communications and Media Authority's guidelines concerning Australian content and documentary programming. The Australian Content Standard came into effect on December 30, 2005 and requires free-to-air television stations to air an annual minimum of 55% Australian programming between 6 a.m. and midnight. Television docs applying for regional film funding must be considered Australian content under the ACMA to qualify. Under this standard there is also a sub-quota concerning documentaries. The ACMA defines a documentary as a "program that is a creative treatment of actuality other than a news, current affairs, sports coverage, magazine, infotainment or light entertainment program" and commercial broadcasters must air at least 20 hours of documentary programs per year.

Australian links

Australia goes digital

The Labor Party got an early start by disbanding Digital Australia, a body that was created to oversee the country's conversion to digital-terrestrial broadcasting. The switch from analog that was set to take place sometime after 2010 under the previous government has now been given a firm date of December 31, 2013.

Call for entries

Aussie broadcaster ABC and the Australian Film Commission are calling for proposals for half-hour and one-hour documentaries that explore contemporary issues and culture from a young perspective. The docs will run on ABC and ABC2, and the call is open to emerging filmmakers 35 years old and younger. The deadline is March 10. Visit afc.gov.au for details.

Australian Communications and Media Authority

The ACMA is a government agency responsible for the regulation of broadcasting, the Internet, radiocommunications and telecommunications in Australia.

acma.gov.au

Australian Film Commission

The AFC is an agency of the Australian Government that supports the development and production of film, television and interactive media projects through various loans and grants.

afc.gov.au

Film Australia Film Australia acts much like Canada's National Film Board, producing, distributing and marketing television documentaries and educational programs that deal with matters of national interest.

It has its own studio, distribution, library and learning center.

filmaust.com.au

Film Finance Corporation The FFC is the Australian Government's principle agency for funding the production of film and television. To date, the FFC has invested in 1,079 projects with a total production value of AU\$2.58 billion (US\$2.27 billion).

ffc.gov.au

New South Wales Film and Television Office The FTO's mission is to facilitate the excellence and commercial growth of the film and television industry in New South Wales. It offers various incentives to film in the area.

fto.nsw.gov.au

Film Victoria Much like the FTO, Film Victoria encourages filming in Victoria through assistance to the film, television and multimedia industry.

film.vic.gov.au