

# **FOREIGN FILM AND TELEVISION DRAMA PRODUCTION IN AUSTRALIA: A RESEARCH REPORT**

Australia as a production destination;  
employment patterns;  
crew experience and attitudes

Australian Film Commission  
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## FOREWORD

Until the mid 1990s, foreign production in Australia was subsidiary to the area of local production. While it may have been an important source of work and revenue for some crew and facilities or post-production businesses, and its spread across Australia was uneven, in terms of the overall economics of the Australian film and television industry, foreign production was considered of marginal interest. And while some state governments developed regional incentive packages, at a federal level, funding and policy were entirely directed towards the development of the local industry.

However, as the Australian dollar dropped and as Australia consolidated its reputation internationally as a nation which produced world class films and world class filmmakers, interest in Australia as a destination for foreign production began to grow. And as the total value of foreign production grew, the impact on our crews and our infrastructure became increasingly apparent and issues surrounding funding and policy became more significant.

In recent years the role of foreign production in Australia has been controversial and surrounded by conflicting claims and arguments. The advent of the large studios, particularly Fox in Sydney, designed to cater for big-budget overseas productions, has heightened debate on the impact of such productions. Those in favour of increasing levels of foreign production point to the economic benefits for the nation as a whole and the employment opportunities arising in production and associated roles. The detractors fear that overseas production could eventually dominate the local industry even to the extent that support for our local creative talent wanes and we become mainly an adjunct to the mainstream US industry.

It was against the background of this debate that the AFC decided to undertake a research project looking at the consequences for the local industry of the growth of the foreign production sector. The results are intended to inform discussion and assist further policy development and planning. For while certain trends and developments result from forces and conditions outside of the film and television industry, choices can and must be made about the nature, the capabilities and the output of the industry we wish to have in Australia.

As the production of film and television increasingly becomes a global business, there is clearly a growing network of interconnections between the Australian production community and 'foreign' production entities: Australian providers of production services and facilities are increasingly taking advantage of foreign production as a source of business; Australian producers are seeking funds overseas and engaging in a range of co-production arrangements, with creative control shared as part of a project's financing.

The fundamental connection between the development of an industry which has the capacity to produce Australian film and television and the potential to grow the level of foreign production is the fact that attracting foreign production requires above all a sophisticated domestic industry: ongoing levels of foreign production can only be sustained where indigenous film industries have reached a high level of sophistication and capability.

'Footloose' productions – film and television projects looking for a production home – make location decisions based on a range of factors. Australia's competitive advantages include our low exchange rate, English language, range of locations, sophisticated cities, developed infrastructure, range of State-based incentives and support mechanisms, and high profile of the industry internationally derived from our local production. The financial advantage, while important, is not sufficient on its own to attract foreign projects.

Key promotional drivers, which can persuade overseas producers to select and often return to Australia, are the quality and work practices of our local crews and creative talent. These have been developed through the making of local films. It is the local production sector that creates the technical and creative skills base used by the foreign production sector.

In Australia State governments and more recently the Federal government have put policies in place to attract further foreign production in recognition of the potential economic benefits. Tax incentives, promotional support and studio and infrastructure development have been key policy levers. The new Federal tax rebate scheme for offshore production companies already appears to be attracting more high-budget films and mini-series to Australia.

However, even before the new Federal tax incentive was introduced, the growth of foreign production was outstripping that of local production: in the last five years spending in Australia by foreign projects increased by 139 per cent, while local production spending increased a mere six per cent. If the growth rates of the two sectors remain too out of kilter, it may weaken the local industry and also make it difficult to service the needs of foreign production.

With stronger growth in the foreign production sector likely, careful management is needed to reap the economic benefits without jeopardising the cultural benefits Australians derive from the Australian industry – or losing many of the qualities that attracted international production here in the first place. The AFC favours a healthy mix of various kinds of production activity. This research seeks to illuminate the complex, sometimes competing, but ultimately synergistic and mutually beneficial relationship between domestic film and television production and international projects attracted from offshore.

Kim Dalton  
Chief Executive Officer

May 2002

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## INTRODUCTION

Three main objectives have underpinned the development of this report:

1. To examine the reasons that foreign productions come to Australia, and identify key determinants and priorities.

A better understanding was needed of how Australia rates on the extensive set of economic factors and production requirements that play a part in production location decisions. This could provide a basis to predict further foreign production growth and inform policy formulation and marketing activities related to Australia as a production destination. In developing such an understanding, it was important to seek the views of overseas producers with experience of working in Australia.

2. To investigate perceptions of crew capacity and depth around Australia, including whether the needs of local and foreign production are being met.

Australia's crews are both essential to the viability of foreign production here and one of its key drawcards. However, there was no data currently available that specifically addressed employment patterns on foreign productions: the roles Australians fill, where the jobs are located and the level of overlap between foreign and domestic production. The synergy between domestic and international productions needed to be explored with a particular focus on crew aspects, to provide a better understanding of the respective roles of foreign and domestic production in building Australia's production capacity.

3. To explore the experience of Australian crew working on foreign productions and, in particular, the role of foreign productions in crew's professional development.

Although skills development has been highlighted as a particular benefit of foreign production activity in Australia, there appeared to be no data available on the kinds of professional development Australian crew are actually gaining on foreign productions and the nature of the learning experience. The views of the crew themselves needed to be sought on the benefits and difficulties involved in foreign production work, and the opportunities for development it offered them.

### Research approach

The research used a variety of sources and methods to address the objectives, including:

- a literature search to find previous research conducted on the subject;
- a structured telephone survey of 161 Australian crew and producers with experience on foreign productions;
- interviews with eight booking service managers in four states;
- interviews conducted in Los Angeles (LA) with 18 LA producers who had recently been involved in production in Australia;
- in-depth interviews key industry figures involved with foreign production in Australia, and with representatives from state film agencies;
- analysis of data on production activity and employment patterns;
- compilation of foreign production credits of Australian freelance production personnel.

More details on the research approach can be found in appendix 1.

**Report structure**

*Chapter 1* provides some background on the growth of foreign production activity in Australia.

*Chapter 2* explores the factors which influence decisions about where a production might be located, and assesses how Australia measures up as a production destination.

*Chapter 3* examines the role of foreign production activity in the employment of Australian crew, including possible effects on local productions.

*Chapter 4* explores the experience of working on foreign productions from the crew's perspective, including financial rewards, opportunities for learning new skills, career development and effects on job satisfaction.

## CHAPTER 1. BACKGROUND

### Summary

- 'Foreign production' is defined as projects under foreign creative control, originated and developed by non-Australians. US projects make up the bulk of foreign projects made here.
- Spending by foreign drama productions in Australia has increased during the 90s. The rise in spending by feature films is mainly due to *higher-budget* productions shooting here. The rise in spending by TV drama production is mainly due to an increasing *number* of productions.
- Foreign drama shot in Australia in 2000/01 spent \$191 million here, accounting for 31 per cent of that year's drama production spending.

### What is 'foreign production'?

The Australian Film Commission defines 'foreign production' as projects under foreign creative control, originated and developed by non-Australians. This includes foreign projects with an Australian production company operating in a service capacity and may involve Australians in key production roles. While Australia has been the location for productions from a number of countries including the UK, India, Japan, Korea and Germany, US projects make up the vast bulk of foreign productions made here and it is US drama productions that are the focus of this report.

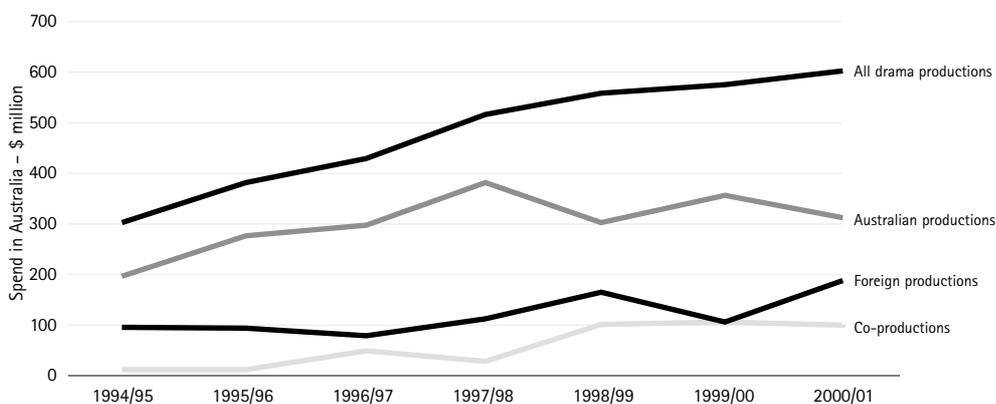
'Co-productions' are defined as projects where creative control is shared between Australian and foreign partners, and where there is a mix of Australian and foreign elements in the creative positions. This includes projects made under the Official Co-production program, i.e. pursuant to an agreement between the Commonwealth Government or the AFC, and a similar authority or government of another country.

Australian productions, referred to as 'local' or 'domestic' productions in this report, are defined as projects under Australian creative control, that is, where the key elements are predominately Australian, and the project was originated and developed by Australians. Projects with these characteristics but which are 100 per cent foreign financed are included in this definition of Australian.

### Production spending in Australia

Drama production activity in Australia has increased steadily over the last seven years. While there is some year to year variation in the level of spending by the various sectors of the industry, the overall pattern is one of steady growth (Figure 1).

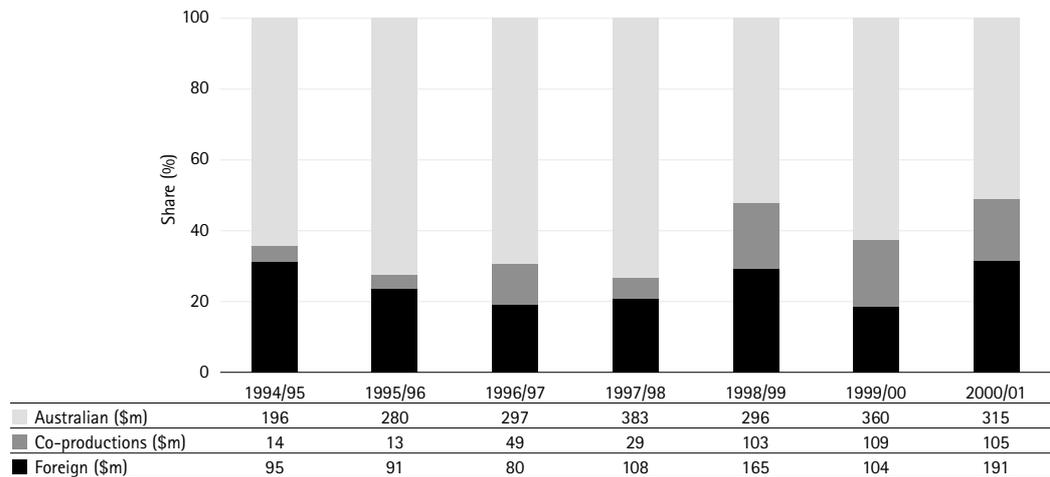
Figure 1. Drama production trends – spend in Australia



Source: AFC, National Survey of Feature Film and TV Drama Production

As the overall size of the production industry grows, the relative contributions of domestic, foreign and co-production activity are changing. The proportion of production spending in Australia attributable to foreign productions and co-productions has grown in the last three years (Figure 2), although year to year variation can be influenced by a big-budget, studio-backed feature in either the domestic or foreign production figures.

Figure 2. Spend in Australia by drama productions – Australian, foreign and co-productions

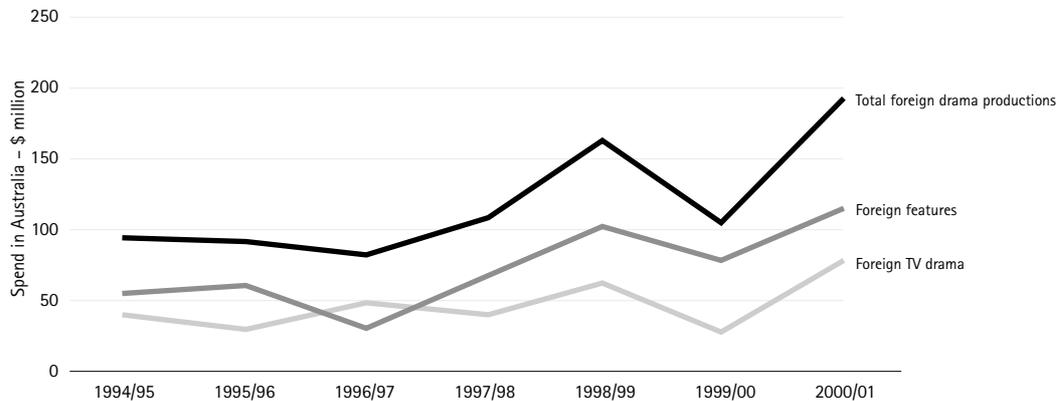


Source: AFC, National Survey of Feature Film and TV Drama Production

The mix of production activity within the foreign drama sector is also changing. Figure 3 shows that spending by both foreign TV drama and foreign feature films has increased significantly since 1996/97, but the increase in feature film spend has been double that of TV drama spend. The significant jump in feature film spend since 1997/98 corresponds with the first productions made at Fox Studios at Moore Park. High-budget studio productions such as *The Matrix*, *Mission Impossible 2* and *Star Wars: Attack of the Clones* are examples of films made at this facility.

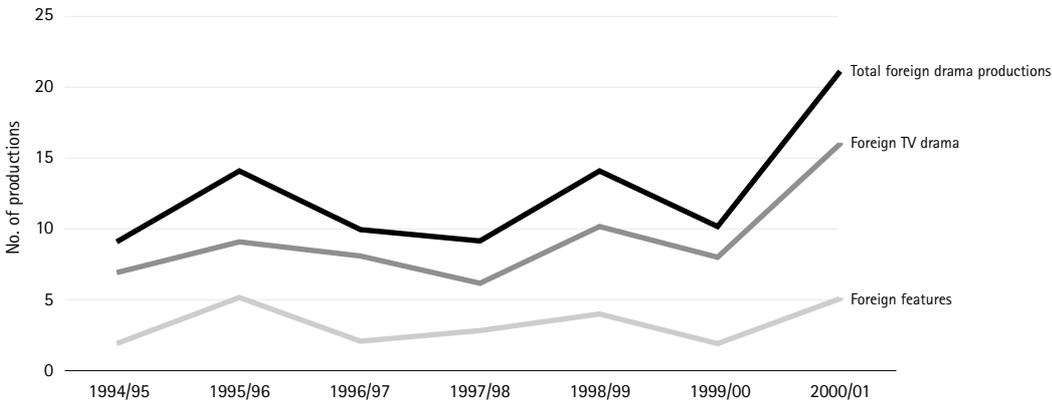
Figure 4 on the next page shows the pattern in the *number* of foreign drama productions. While the number of foreign feature films has shown a fairly steady increase over the period, the number of TV dramas has shown a strong increase. This indicates that spending in Australia by foreign features is being fuelled mainly by *bigger-budget* productions, rather than a substantial increase in numbers. The increase in spending by TV drama, however, has come from increased *volume*. This changing mix may have implications for local crews, as higher-budget features and lower-budget television differ in terms of the types of employment opportunities offered.

Figure 3. Trends in foreign drama production spend in Australia



Source: AFC, National Survey of Feature Film and TV Drama Production

Figure 4. Trends in the number of foreign drama productions

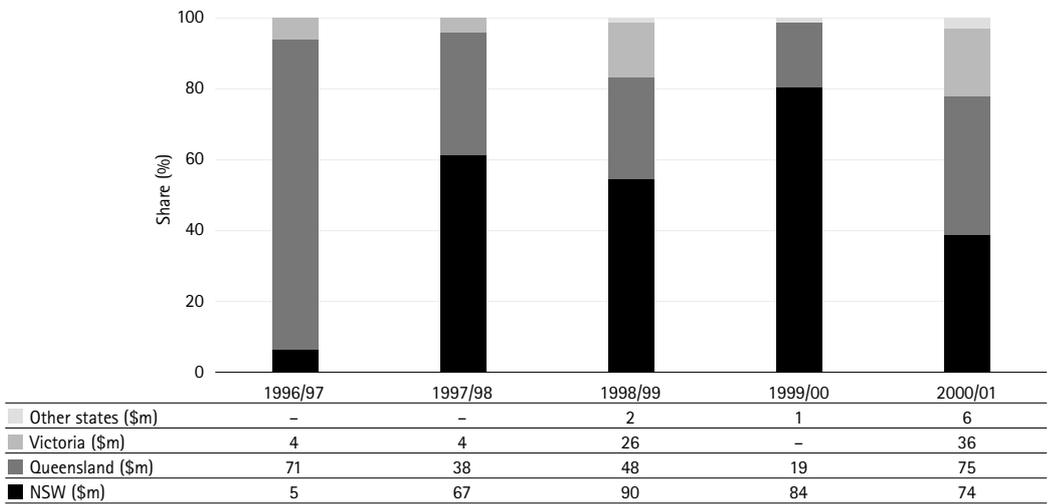


Source: AFC, National Survey of Feature Films and TV Drama Production

### Spread of activity in each state

Growth in foreign production activity has been uneven across Australia's production centres. The AFC survey of feature film and TV drama production indicates that most foreign drama production has occurred in the eastern states of NSW, Queensland and Victoria (Figure 5). The figure also indicates that the spread of foreign production has changed in recent years. Queensland had the bulk of the work prior to the opening of Fox Studios. Since then the NSW share of foreign production has increased substantially. Victoria's foreign production work has been more spasmodic, although sizeable in 1998/99 and 2000/01, and it is likely to increase when the new Docklands studio is up and running (see page 17). Foreign production in South Australia, Western Australia, Tasmania and the territories has been relatively small, with some growth in 2000/01.

Figure 5. Share of foreign drama production spending by location



Source: AFC, National Survey of Feature Films and TV Drama Production



## CHAPTER 2. AUSTRALIA AS A PRODUCTION DESTINATION

*This chapter explores the range of factors which influence decisions about where a production might be located, and assesses how Australia measures up in attracting a slice of the 'global production pie.'*

### Summary

- Economic factors such as exchange rates and cheaper production costs were seen to be the major factors attracting drama productions to Australia.
- The new federal tax incentive was seen in a positive light by both Australian and LA producers interviewed. However, the budget range requirements and exclusion of television projects were criticised by some.
- Production infrastructure was seen as a necessary prerequisite but not a reason in itself for bringing a project to Australia.
- While economic factors initially attract foreign productions to Australia, both LA and local producers believed that what will keep them coming back is the inventiveness and efficiency of the Australian crews and the relationships formed. However, a perceived lack of crew depth was the most commonly cited deterrent.
- Seven out of 18 LA-based producers perceived a lack of crew depth as the most common difficulty with filming in Australia, although few had actually experienced problems crewing their own productions here. Sydney has the strongest reputation for supply of skilled crew.
- Other issues cited by the LA producers included Australia's distance from the US, difficulties with unions and problems with the availability of production infrastructure.
- Australia is seen as competitive with Canada (with 11 out of the 18 producers choosing Australia as their first-choice foreign production destination) because of the exchange rate and climate. Those who placed other locations ahead cited logistical and bureaucratic reasons.

The key influences on a decision about where to locate a drama production fall into two broad categories:<sup>1</sup>

- Economic factors, including the effect of the exchange rate; production costs, particularly below-the-line costs such as crew costs, equipment and facilities; and government incentives.
- Production requirements, including infrastructure, crew depth and crew quality; and location issues such as an appropriate setting for the story, preferences of the director and actors, and the producer's 'ability to control' the production.

This chapter explores these factors through interviews with 18 LA producers who had recently been involved in production in Australia. Particular emphasis was placed on crew-related aspects of the location decision, in particular crew quality and crew depth. The views of booking service managers for freelance crew, and of Australian crew themselves, were also sought on this issue.

<sup>1</sup> These factors were identified in *A Bigger Slice of the Pie*, the November 2000 report by Malcolm Long and Associates for AusFILM. That report in turn drew on the US Monitor Company's *US Runaway Film and Television Study Report*, 1999.

## Economic factors

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Most of the LA producers interviewed cited the whole economic package as the reason they brought their last production to Australia, including the exchange rate, costs and incentives. Most were reluctant to specify any particular aspect of the deal that was the most influential.

*Economics is everything! The whole deal.*

*The economics are superior to Canada even.*

### Production costs

Most of the LA producers perceived below-the-line costs<sup>2</sup> to be cheaper in Australia, specifically mentioning this as a key attraction. Kim Williams, former CEO of Fox Studios, Sydney, also drew attention to Australia's cost-competitive position, noting that facilities at Fox Studios are marginally cheaper than the cheapest facilities in Canada and 50 per cent cheaper than Britain's studios. However, he also pointed out that facility costs are only a small component of below-the-line costs, the most significant being labour and material costs.

Comparing costs can be an intensive exercise: Australian line producer/production manager Barbara Gibbs, who has worked on many foreign productions here, described having to prepare very detailed budgets for projects where the location decision had yet to be made. The producers wanted to compare locations for every single budget item.

Australia's crew wages were considered internationally competitive by the LA producers interviewed, despite differences in the length of the working day. In the US, production workers generally work a 12-hour day, while in Australia a 10-hour day is set in the union's industrial agreement. A 12-hour day has been negotiated for foreign productions in Australia, with crew receiving overtime for the additional two hours.

Some LA producers noted the potential for an explosion in labour costs as demand for quality crew outstripped supply, possibly undermining Australia's competitive position on crew costs. This issue is further explored under 'crew depth' later in the chapter.

### Exchange rates

Australia's cost-competitiveness is obviously enhanced by exchange rates favourable to US offshore productions. Over the last five years the value of the Australian dollar has fallen by around 33 per cent against the US dollar, from US\$0.75 to around US\$0.50. After a drop in 1998 as a result of the Asian economic downturn, the dollar regained strength and remained around the US\$0.65 mark until mid-2000, when it dropped below US\$0.50. It has hovered around the US\$0.50 level for the last 12 months.

Half of the LA producers interviewed explicitly listed the exchange rate as one of the factors that influenced their decision to bring a project to Australia. Others simply referred to the whole economic package without specifically mentioning the exchange rate. However, many of the projects these producers had been involved with would have been undertaken before the mid-2000 fall in the Australian dollar. The response of some producers with experience since then suggests the exchange rate is now making Australia extremely competitive on economic factors.

*LA & London were too expensive... [Australian] financial rebates were attractive and then when the dollar fell from .64 to .50 cents, yahoo! We had more money than expected.*

*We were thrilled when the dollar dropped after we had budgeted and commenced production.*

The budget's bottom line is affected by both the exchange rate and the value of production costs themselves, as well as any rebates or other incentives – the 'whole economic package'. There was no evidence of a particular 'threshold' exchange rate above which producers would cease to consider Australia as a production destination, or below which Australia automatically became a desirable location.

2 'Above-the-line' costs include development costs and fees for writer, director, producers and lead cast. 'Below-the-line' costs cover everything else.

However, Jane Corden of Money Penny Services has suggested that if the Australian dollar were to strengthen to above US\$0.60, the other advantages may start to be outweighed, "although this depends on the extent to which other jurisdictions increase or change their incentives. It is all about bottom line."

Australian crew tended to see the exchange rate as a particularly important factor. Most (82 per cent) of those surveyed mentioned the weak Australian dollar when asked for their impression of what brings foreign productions here.

### Government incentives

Government incentives such as tax rebates can have a significant effect on levels of production activity. For example, Ireland's film industry boomed under favourable tax arrangements for film production companies and experienced a significant downturn when uncertainty surrounded the scheme, until the government confirmed its continuation until 2005. Similarly, Brazil's film production industry collapsed following the removal of tax incentives and experienced a resurgence when a 3 per cent income tax write-off was introduced for companies investing in movies.<sup>3</sup>

US concerns about loss of local production to countries such as Canada led to an inquiry by the US Department of Commerce and International Trade Commission into Canadian film and television subsidies,<sup>4</sup> and the introduction into the US House of Representatives last October of the United States Independent Film and Television Incentive Act of 2001, which proposes an attractive national tax incentive for film and television production in the US.

Just under half of the LA producers interviewed explicitly mentioned tax incentives when listing the reasons they had chosen Australia.

Some Australian states offer payroll tax rebate and other salary incentive schemes (see appendix 2) to attract productions to that state. At a federal level, Division 10B of the *Income Tax Assessment Act 1936* has been used by film and television productions in Australia – including, under some conditions, foreign productions.<sup>5</sup> However, uncertainty created by difficulties in interpretation made it unpopular with offshore producers.

This lack of confidence in 10B was reflected in comments by some LA producers interviewed, who made special note that previous tax incentives were not an attraction because of their uncertainty.

*Tax incentives not even a consideration – because they are never a surety.*

*There's no surety of the Australian tax rebate and I haven't seen anyone qualify yet. And it's better to know exactly what you have to spend.*

However, a new tax incentive was announced by the Federal Government in September 2001, reportedly after consultation with the American Motion Picture Association and studios including Warner Roadshow and Fox.<sup>6</sup> The new scheme offers a tax rebate to producers equal to 12.5 per cent of money spent in Australia, for film, telemovies and mini-series productions with below-the-line spend of \$15 million plus in Australia. Films with Australian expenditure of between \$15 million and \$50 million will have to spend 70 per cent of their total expenditure in Australia to qualify. Films with Australian expenditure over \$50 million will not have to meet the 70 per cent requirement.

Australian producer Andrew Mason felt that the new scheme had arrived just in time. "It had become a great pastime in LA to report on how the Australian tax department was heading for the promoters' bums with truckloads of pineapples," he said. "It had got to the point where people were saying they didn't want to go there ... they don't like pineapples."

3 Jo Doolan (partner at Ernst & Young), 'Taxing Times: Film tax incentives are hobbit-forming', *Independent Business weekly* (NZ) 30/01/2002.

4 McNary, Dave, 'Feds launch probe into Canadian biz subsidies, Canuck operations', *Variety*, 29 November 2001.

5 10B is a broad-based concession relating to the first ownership of copyright in an eligible production. It allows a 100 per cent tax deduction to initial investors over two financial years, starting when the film is first used to derive income (i.e. when the project is completed).

6 Don Groves, 'Oz Sets Rebate Plan to Lure H-wood Coin', *Variety*, Oct. 17, 2001.

In LA the new tax scheme had been reported in leading trade magazines such as *Variety* and *Hollywood Reporter*. Most of the LA producers interviewed were aware of it, and most said it would increase the likelihood of their bringing more productions to Australia.

Some LA producers who had had their projects rejected for other Australian tax incentives were hesitant in their support. They felt a tax incentive that did not deliver as expected does more harm to the country's reputation and works as a detractor. The need for certainty – for a scheme with predictability, consistency and transparency attached to it – was a theme in some LA producers' comments.

*If it's REAL it excites me but if you can't [get it passed] or the requirements are such that they can't be met, then don't even talk about it.*

*Absolutely, but I would have to know we qualify or not BEFORE we film.*

Most Australian producers and production managers interviewed felt the scheme would be effective in encouraging foreign production in Australia. One local producer commented: "The tax component [in any deal] is crucial. It is very hard to get anyone in a studio to focus on a currency difference. Most Americans don't even know there are other currencies. Money is the American dollar. Talk about a tax deal and there is x percent available and that makes sense to them immediately." Another made the point that the new system was easier to understand than 10B: "You can include it in your top sheet budget and you can see what you get."

Not all Australian producers, however, were pleased with the budget range restriction and felt it would do little for the bulk of the foreign production work currently in Australia. Television 'movies of the week' (telemovies) were singled out as missing out on assistance under the new scheme as their budgets tend to be well under the \$15 million mark.<sup>7</sup>

Others also criticised the high-end budget range of the scheme based on the belief that tax incentives are not as important in location decisions for big-budget projects. Production requirements will have greater weight.

### **Production requirements**

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Although economic factors are a key component in winning 'a bigger slice' of the foreign production 'pie', the decision to make a project in a particular place will also need to consider such production requirements as infrastructure, crew, and locations that are appropriate and accessible.

#### **Infrastructure**

Fox Studios in Moore Park, Sydney, and Warner Roadshow Studios on the Gold Coast in Queensland have been the most prolific sites for foreign production to date.

Fox Studios offers extensive pre-production, production and post-production facilities on its 24.3-hectare site. It has six world-class sound studios and more are currently under construction. There are 60 independent businesses based on the site, including a full digital effects facility and a full sound post-production facility. Although the demand for television production has been strong, feature film production has tended to occupy most of the facility's resources. On 24 April 2002, the NSW Government approved a multi-million dollar expansion of studio complex, which will see the old entertainment backlot turned into studio space. This will make it the biggest studio complex in Australia.

Warner Roadshow Studios on the Queensland Gold Coast is situated on 13 hectares adjacent to the Warner Bros. Movie World Theme Park. The studios have provided a base for numerous US television productions and films and currently consist of six sound stages, production offices, editing rooms, wardrobe and construction workshops, and a 230-acre backlot. In March 2002, the Queensland Government's Pacific Film and Television Corporation (PFTC) announced that it will lend the studios \$8 million to expand by 50 per cent, providing two new sound stages, two sets of production offices and two construction workshops by August 2002.

<sup>7</sup> Foreign telemovie activity increased significantly last financial year (AFC National Survey of Feature Film and TV Drama Production 2000/01) rising by 250 per cent to \$124 million with \$67 million spent in Australia. The number of telemovies doubled from seven to 14 in this period. Eight of the 14 had a budget above \$6 million but only one was above \$15 million.

The Victorian Government has invested \$40 million in studio development in Melbourne's Dockland area, with the key objective of increasing the volume of both local and offshore production in the state.

The general availability of sound stages was raised by a number of LA producers as a necessary prerequisite but not a big attraction by itself.

However, some expressed concern about the ongoing availability of studio space in Australia, believing that because of the growing demand for large sound stages, a shortage is inevitable. Three producers raised production infrastructure availability as a possible deterrent. They also felt that post-production facilities were not up to Hollywood standards except at Fox Studios. More general infrastructure problems like transportation were an issue for one producer.

### Crew quality

The LA producers interviewed were unanimous in their view of the skills and level of professionalism among Australian crew: all said the top Australian crews were on par with LA crews.

*They compare very favourably. No trouble getting all the skilled people needed.*

*Great, I think their DOPs [directors of photography] are the best in the world. In fact I've taken them and other Australian crews to other countries. They travel better, are hardier. But they don't like working weekends whereas US crews want to work weekends.*

*Crews compare very well. They ALL care about the product.*

Half the LA producers specifically mentioned the quality of Australian crew as an attraction in bringing their project to Australia in the first place. And once they'd worked here, 11 producers named Australian crews as a major benefit of the experience.

*The biggest plus is that the crews still remember how to work without enormous amounts of money being thrown at them.*

*Quality of the crews is great and although the depth [numbers] is not there, I think that will look after itself as more work keeps coming.*

*Crew level is good. Casting is good and skilled in US accent. Talent pool is good and deep and reliable.*

The importance of Australian crew's work culture was also noted by Australian industry practitioners as a key attraction in Australia's favour. According to Kim Williams, former Fox Studios CEO, "the thing that rates with filmmakers is a capacity to perform and attitudinal culture. That means more than anything – until you get bean counters coming in and then they'll make money count. Culture on the part of our crews, properly managed, is a wonderful thing. Our Australian crews have a terrifically rigorous set of standards. They are hard workers; they have a nice easy informality on sets; they are disciplined; they are very respectful of the needs and requirements of a director and the design team. They are flexible and have no demarcation issues."

### Crew depth

Although the LA producers were unanimous in their praise for the quality of Australian crew, 'crew depth' – the *number* of skilled crew available – was the most commonly listed deterrent to filming in Australia. Seven of the 18 producers cited this, unprompted, as a difficulty or potential difficulty.

Some observed that in total Australia has a strong film production base but that it was scattered across a number of states. While crew depth was perceived as reasonable in some locations, crew shortages were found to be a significant issue in other parts of Australia. Sydney had the strongest reputation for supply of skilled crew, although capacity was perceived to be easily reached once a number of big-budget productions were shooting at the same time.

*Australia has a good base film industry but it's not deep and it's scattered.*

*Not enough crew – if Matrix or Mission Impossible II or Star Wars are filming, then there are not enough qualified electricians or grips.*

*Not enough competition in all crew areas to have some choice – all the really skilled crew and heads are in Sydney. Crews in Queensland can be cliquish.*

However, when the LA producers were specifically asked whether they had faced difficulties crewing their productions, only four said they had, and these were confined to a few areas such as electricians and visual effects. Crew shortages in some locations had been managed by sourcing crew from other states (see chapter 3 for a discussion of the movement of crew between states).

Given that most producers interviewed had not experienced a specific difficulty, the pervasive impression that crew depth is an issue in Australia could simply be the result of comparisons with the vast choice of available crew in LA. This was in fact raised by several of the LA producers interviewed. More depth in Australia was desired to ensure competitive rates and avoid inflated labour costs, rather than because of an actual shortage of crew.

*You can't even compare with LA, where there is sooooo much of everything and you've got to be good to survive. You can get 30 bids on something straight away. You have choices that you don't have in Australia.*

*Nothing, even NY, is on par with LA. It just has the largest pool of crews.*

Australian producers and production managers who participated in the research generally held a different view of Australia's crew depth. Eighteen out of the 20 Australian producers and production managers interviewed felt there was sufficient depth of skilled personnel when their first choice was not available. Only two Australian producers said there was not sufficient depth in all crew roles, specifically identifying costume designers, make-up and wardrobe, and first assistant directors as problem areas.

Most booking service managers for freelance crew reported there were always heads of department available but some noted that filling the role with the particular creative and artistic approach desired could be more difficult. A Queensland booking service manager said that if crew were not available locally she would contact interstate booking services to ensure the work remained with Australian crew. In most states a shortage of electric department crew and production accountants was reported by booking services, and in Queensland experienced first assistant directors were also perceived to be in short supply.

State film agencies were also canvassed on the perceived gaps in their production community. In Victoria, the crewing difficulties experienced by some LA producers were acknowledged by the Melbourne Film Office, with the lighting department, especially well-equipped gaffers, experiencing a squeeze. Melbourne's production infrastructure was reported as being depleted by movement of crew and equipment to productions in other states.

The NSW Film and Television Office (FTO) also reported crew movements to meet production needs in other states. The FTO believes it is depth among highly skilled and experienced crew in particular that LA producers are seeking. The top crews – the best of the best the country has to offer and the most sought after in terms of their skill base – were referred to as the 'A team', with Sydney reportedly able to field three such teams at a given time.

In Queensland, the Pacific Film and Television Commission (PFTC) believes the consistent flow of work through the Warner Roadshow Studios and the government incentive targeting employment of Queenslanders have built a skilled and sustainable crew base from the ground up. The PFTC saw this base as adequate to support a globally competitive production centre, although it views further growth as desirable to provide more crew depth.

The South Australian Film Corporation reported that there may be a shortage of first assistant directors in the state, as well as of some camera and wardrobe crew, while Screen West mentioned possible shortages in Western Australia in some areas of drama production, particularly continuity, and among documentary editors.

Chapter 3 further examines crew depth issues in addressing access to foreign production

employment for Australian crew, and the movement of crew between the states. The views expressed by LA producers suggest there is a need to address the *perception* that crew depth is a problem with production in Australia. Difficulties which may have been experienced in a particular location may be generalised to the country as a whole and could potentially damage Australia's reputation in this globally competitive arena.

### Crew relations

The egalitarian production culture, love of film making, inventiveness, efficiency and diversity of skills – all qualities gained by crew from working on local productions – were key aspects noted when LA producers reflected on what they had learnt from Australian crew.

*[I learnt] how to be more in the trenches, a worker among workers, one of the mates – to embrace the egalitarian culture. I learnt to listen and participate and clearly communicate, stay open and watch and suggest if you think it might be done a better way and listen to other suggestions, not just dictate. I learnt how to surf!*

*I like that the average person on the crew is interested in the film. I learnt it's important to talk to people in the other areas of the production about an area they are not in re the film. They often have some good insights. [This is] not done in US but in Oz everyone is interested in all aspects. I like this atmosphere to work in. In the US it's very departmentalised. I've used this approach here [LA] – and act as if I'm working with an Aussie crew.*

*Australian crews have a great attitude – they don't forget how lucky we are making movies. They are fun to work with.*

*[The crew's] attitude is – OK if you can't pay me big bucks I can still do a great job. They take on the challenge of a small budget and come up with the big-budget look in taking on the challenge.*

However, Australia's industrial climate was a factor raised by some LA producers when discussing the deterrents to production in Australia. Difficulties with unions were commented on by some producers (6 out of 18) as a deterrent. A couple commented on the difficulties they had faced importing cast and crew although others commented on this being a historical problem but no longer an issue.

#### Requirements for importing overseas crew

To work in Australia, all performers and crew from overseas must travel to Australia on an Entertainer Sub-Class 420 Visa. To secure an Entertainer Visa, the person must be sponsored by an Australian company or an Australian permanent resident or citizen, and the Australian sponsor must consult with the Media, Entertainment and Arts Alliance (MEAA).

One of the things considered is the extent to which the application complies with the provisions of the 'net employment benefit test'. This test requires the Australian sponsor to demonstrate that engaging the overseas person will lead to greater employment of Australians in the entertainment industry than would have been the case had Australian personnel been engaged.

Along with other supporting information, the technician's deal memo or contract must be included with the application, and it must set out that:

- the overseas person is to receive remuneration and terms and conditions including accommodation, travel and transport within Australia, and per diems no less favourable than those contained in the relevant Australian award/agreement
- the sponsor will provide the overseas person with return international air fare/s and take out medical insurance on that person's behalf.

Sources: MEAA guidelines: 'Sponsoring an Overseas Person to Undertake Employment in the Australian Entertainment Industry' (<http://www.alliance.org.au/imports/film&tv.htm>); 'Engaging Performers and Technicians from Overseas to Work in Australia' (<http://www.alliance.org.au/imports/perftech.htm>)

Lynn Gailey, of the Media, Entertainment and Arts Alliance (MEAA) believes that experience is a significant contributor to good crew relations. "Over the years, the more familiar a production company has become with working in Australia, the less likely it is that they will want to import crew," she said. "But it depends on the production: the rule of thumb is that they need to use an Australian first assistant director for the production to run smoothly, because the work practices are different."

### Location issues

There are three main location issues: the requirements of the story, preferences of the director and actors about where they want to be, and the effect of the location on the producers' ability to control the production.

Story requirements were raised as a consideration by six of the 18 LA producers interviewed. Australia's diversity of locations was well appreciated: Bondi and Avalon in NSW have been the locations for *Baywatch*, for example, and Dalesford Victoria for *Ponderosa*, the new series of *Bonzana*.

*It was the right place as we needed both English and LA looks, which Australia has. Plus it's English-speaking.*

*Locations ... beaches [for Hawaii] and country for Ohio look-a-like.*

*Cost was major factor but also [the need to] look like California in the forties....[We chose it] over Canada because we needed exotic exteriors that Australia provided as well.*

A few producers mentioned differences between the urban streetscape of Australian cities and US cities as a possible barrier for some productions.

*The lack of modern day exteriors [might be a barrier] – that is, all the signs are different. And being on the wrong side of the road.*

*Depends on the film. If it's an action film or urban drama, the whole car thing and driving on the wrong side of the road is difficult.*

Australia's diversity of locations has been a key promotional element for state and federal agencies when marketing Australia to foreign producers. This potential seems to be recognised and has been effective in swaying some production decisions to shoot in Australia.

The favourable year-round weather conditions, similar to LA, in both the Gold Coast and Sydney were noted as an attraction by some producers, particularly over Canada. Four producers also referred to the 'reverse' seasons as an asset.

In terms of actor or director preferences, Australia is currently seen as a 'cool' place to be. For directors, the work culture of Australian crews is viewed as an asset in providing a supportive environment, and the success of Australian actors like Nicole Kidman and Russell Crowe in Hollywood has helped enhance Australia's prominence among the Hollywood acting community. Despite this, not being seen around LA and in touch with the gossip about projects being planned was seen to be a concern. Australia's distance from LA could therefore influence actors and directors in favour of other offshore locations like Canada.

*The biggest challenge for television is getting stars to spend time in Australia if you're looking at a series. They're insecure enough here [in LA] about their next job but getting them to spend 6-10 months in Australia ... !*

The difficulties of distance and the travel required have increased since September 11. Some producers reported network-wide decisions to reduce travel associated with production. However, with the passage of time, Australia will be able to capitalise on the perception that it is a 'safe' location for filming. In fact, at the Screen Producers Association of Australia (SPAA) conference in November 2001, Louisa Coppel from Film Victoria's Melbourne Film Office reported a significant

increase in enquiries since September 11. Although people's first reaction may be to stay home, eventually, if they have to travel, the safety of the destination becomes important.

Distance from LA was raised by six of the producers as a difficulty they faced when working here. Some mentioned the difficulty of managing or developing other projects while away from home base. Others perceive a loss of control when the production is at a distance. Communication across different time zones was also raised as a difficulty.

*If [you are] out of town too long other work goes.*

*Possibly distance [is a drawback], although I remind folks when they cry 'distance' that it took three and a half days to get from NY to LA when the business first started here!*

*Some people say they feel they lose control when they are away from home and I tell them – you have no control any way!*

### **Future prospects**

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Even though the LA producers interviewed perceive some obstacles with filming in Australia, 11 out of 18 said 'nothing' would deter them from filming here in the future. This suggests a high level of satisfaction with their Australian experience. Some said economics and finance would be the only deterrent should Australia no longer be as economically competitive; some said the distance from LA was the main deterrent; and others said it would depend on the appropriateness of Australia for the story.

*I think the country, people and crews are wonderful – I'd do another one in a second – just with caution as far as the tax department is concerned.*

*I just think it's a fab place to film!*

While financial factors will always be a central element in studio decisions on where to film a project, the interviews with LA producers indicated that crews play a pivotal role in building the kind of relationships that will keep them coming back to Australia. Many producers expressed how enjoyable they had found the experience because of the crew's production culture and pride in their industry. It is the elements that come from having a vibrant local industry that are so attractive to the offshore producers.

*Part of embracing Australia is embracing the egalitarian culture. This will bring success. Australia has a very real film industry that is not just a support for the US as some other countries. They make films with a definite point of view and great passion. Every individual takes great pride in every aspect of filmmaking like nowhere else in the world.*

*I loved it there and would go back in a heartbeat. The crews are friendly, involved, they take filmmaking seriously and are multi-taskers. Everyone's a filmmaker not a technician, which gives a wonderful feeling to the whole experience. They are committed, enthusiastic and happy to be there.*

*I am a big fan of Oz – I love the people and think Aussies and Americans are very alike even historically. You have great DOPs [directors of photography] and for the size of the country the talent is amazing. If I could make a suggestion it would be to look at training incentives to train crews so there is more competition, so more competitive rates. Look at the incentives in crew training that Canada offers.*

*Familiarity breeds contentment! Once you have established relationships there it makes it easy to return.*

### **How we rate against our competitors**

All the LA producers interviewed had filmed in offshore locations other than Australia: all had worked

in Canada; three in New Zealand and England, and a couple referred to Mexico. Other locations included the Caribbean, Luxembourg, Hong Kong, Czech Republic, Hungary, Lithuania and Morocco.

Eleven (out of 18) said Australia would be their first choice for future offshore productions. Australia is seen by these producers as more competitive than Canada because of the exchange rate and the climate; and more favourable than New Zealand because of crew depth, lower wage costs and better production infrastructure. A few qualified their choice of Australia with the proviso that the location suited the film.

A couple of producers expressed a preference for Canada, for logistical reasons rather than economics. Vancouver's two-hour flight time from LA was one aspect of Canada's attraction, and the close proximity of New York to some Canadian locations gave access to a large pool of high-quality actors. And South Africa was a preferred location for one producer "because the dollar is weaker at half the Australian. ... The major deterrent there would be security."

### **The role of marketing**

When asked how they were made aware of Australia as a production location, all producers cited established relationships, either with studios or Australian key creative teams working in LA. This suggests that Australia could improve its competitive position by more effective central marketing of the many positive attributes the country has to offer. Based on the research, crew qualities should be promoted, and fears of insufficient crew depth addressed. Building relationships between foreign and Australian production entities should also be supported.

The potential for growth through marketing has been recognised by the Federal Government, which recently allocated funds to AusFILM, the industry body which markets Australia overseas as an offshore destination for film and TV production. As part of a package of initiatives announced in September 2001, AusFILM is to receive a \$1 million annually for four years, starting in 2002/03.

AusFILM has also recently produced a *Guide to Filming in Australia*, which gathers together a range of information covering locations, facilities, crews, casting and talent, immigration, exchange rates and tax incentives (including those operated by the state film agencies).

## CHAPTER 3. FOREIGN PRODUCTION AND EMPLOYMENT

*This chapter examines the role of foreign production activity in the employment of Australian crew, including possible effects on local productions.*

### Summary

- Around 17 per cent of Australian freelance production workers have experience on a foreign feature or TV drama production. Roles where Australian crew are more likely to have a foreign production credit include: special effects (30 per cent), first assistant directors (29 per cent), grips (27 per cent), gaffers (26 per cent), sound editors (26 per cent), directors of photography (24 per cent), and art directors (24 per cent).
- The crew survey indicated a high overlap between foreign feature and TV drama experience: 42 per cent of the production crew surveyed had worked on both a foreign feature and a foreign TV drama.
- NSW crew with foreign experience are more likely to have worked on a foreign feature, with 79 per cent having done so in the past five years, compared to 58 per cent on a TV drama. In Queensland and Victoria, the reverse is true with foreign TV experience significantly more common than work on a foreign feature.
- Department heads on foreign productions tend to be sourced from offshore. Production designers, however, were more often Australian. The use of Australians as department heads was more common on television productions than features.
- There was no evidence of two separate industries within the Australian production industry, one working mainly on foreign productions and the other on local productions. For 36 per cent of the crew surveyed, foreign productions represented a quarter or less of their work, and only 26 per cent said it represented more than 75 per cent of their work.
- The team on the project and the pay rate were most commonly cited as the key factor in the decision to take a job (although the script tended to be the most important for 'key creative' crew). Being an Australian production was the most important factor for only 4 per cent (5 per cent of key creative crew and 3 per cent of others).
- 18 out of 19 Australian producers and production managers felt that foreign productions were creating opportunities for new entrants.

Australian Bureau of Statistics research indicates that employment in the film and video production industry grew by 153 per cent between 1993 and 2000 – from 5,998 to 15,195.<sup>8</sup> The extent to which this growth can be attributed to foreign production in Australia is unknown, although ABS data on sources of income for the industry indicates a shift towards the provision of production and post-production services, which grew by more than 80 per cent between 1996/97 and 1999/00, compared to the production of completed works, which grew by less than one per cent over the same period. In June 2000, 47 per cent of the production workforce were casual or temporary employees.<sup>9</sup>

This chapter explores a range of issues including:

- the distribution of foreign production work across the states, in relation to where crew are based;
- the spread of work between foreign features and TV drama;

<sup>8</sup> ABS, *Film and Video Production and Distribution* (cat 8679.0) 1993/94, 1996/97 and 1999/2000.

<sup>9</sup> ABS employment estimates are based on a snapshot of production businesses at a particular date. As most drama production crew work on a freelance basis from project to project the ABS estimates are influenced by the number of projects in production at the time of the snapshot. The ABS data covers all forms of film and television production including news and current affairs programs, documentaries, light entertainment and infotainment, comedy, sport, corporate videos and music videos.

- the roles Australians perform, including the use of Australians as department heads;
- the mix of foreign and domestic productions in the work of Australian crew;
- the role of foreign productions in creating opportunities for new entrants.

It draws on the results of a telephone survey of 161 Australian crew who had worked on a foreign drama in the last five years, an analysis of the foreign drama credits of crew listed in the industry directory *The Production Book*; analysis of the credits of foreign productions made here in the past six years, and interviews with key players such as booking agencies, the Media, Entertainment and Arts Alliance (MEAA), and state agencies.

**Crewing foreign productions**

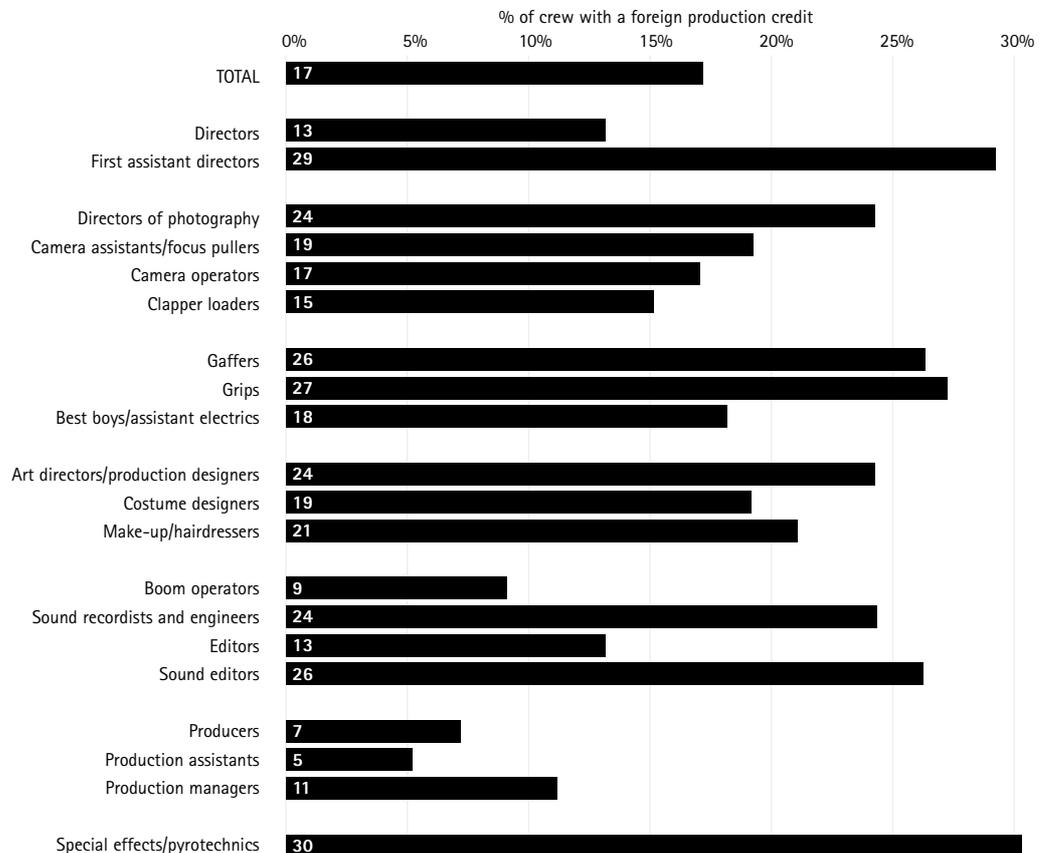
To ascertain the extent of foreign drama experience across Australia’s freelance production workforce, a tally of the foreign drama credits listed in the industry directory, *The Production Book 2001* was compiled for each state, covering a selection of crew roles.

Based on this analysis, around 17 per cent of the Australian production workforce has worked on a foreign drama production (see Figure 6). This is likely to underestimate the extent of foreign production experience among Australian crew, as the credits would not cover more recent experience and work on foreign TVCs and other non-drama productions is not captured.

Across production roles there was some variation. The most likely to have foreign production experience were digital effects and pyrotechnics crew (30 per cent) and first assistant directors (29 per cent). Around a quarter of the listed art directors, gaffers, grips, directors of photography, sound recordists and sound editors had a foreign production credit.

Directors were the least likely to list a foreign production credit.

Figure 6. Extent of foreign drama production experience among Australian freelance production workers



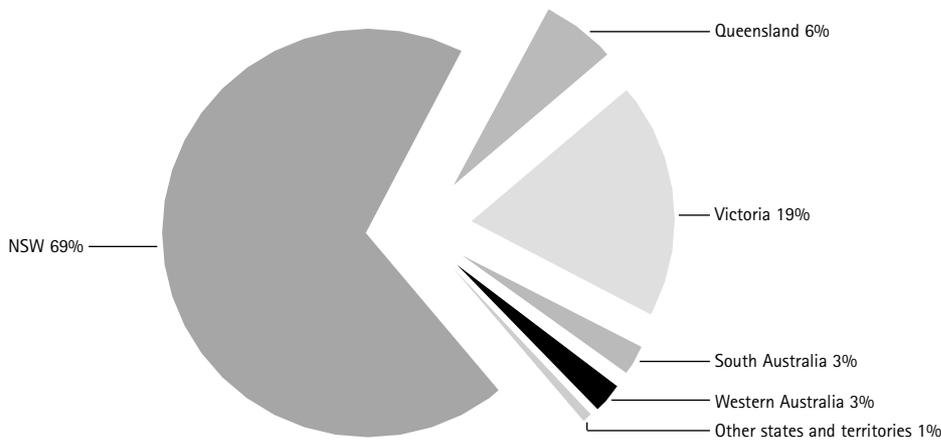
Source: Australian Film Commission, analysis of foreign drama credits listed in *The Production Book 2001*

The Media, Entertainment and Arts Alliance (MEAA) points out that qualifications are relevant for some roles. "We will always say to them that you must use an Australian production manager and first assistant director, location person and anyone who requires a licence, for example a gaffer, rigging, grips, any safety, special effects, armoury or stunts crew," said the MEAA's Lynn Gailey. "They have to deliver to the safety requirements for Australia."

**Where foreign productions source crew**

According to ABS statistics, of the 15,195 people working for businesses in the film and video production industry at the end of June 2000,<sup>10</sup> the majority (69.2 per cent) were in NSW. Victoria had 18.9 per cent, Queensland 5.8 per cent, South Australia 2.5 per cent, Western Australia 2.8 per cent and the remaining states and territories less than 1 per cent (see Figure 7). Employment in NSW and Queensland has doubled (96 per cent increase) since 1996/97 and increased by 25 per cent in Victoria. South Australia and Western Australia showed a decline in employment in production over this period.

Figure 7. Spread of employment in the film and video production industry, June 2000



Source: ABS, *Film and Video production and Distribution* (cat 8679.0), 1999-2000

The crew survey indicated a significant amount of movement between states to work on foreign productions. Table 1 shows that among the NSW-based production personnel interviewed, 65 per cent had worked on a foreign production in some other state: 56 per cent of NSW-based crew had worked in Queensland and 14 per cent in Victoria.

Table 1. Movement of production crew for foreign productions

	Worked outside home state	...in NSW	...in Qld	... in Vic.	... in other states
Based in NSW	65%		56%	14%	6%
Based in Queensland	34%	17%		9%	11%
Based in Victoria	90%	26%	74%		3%
Based in SA, WA, Tas, ACT or NT	100%	50%	50%	0%	

Source: Australian Film Commission, survey of crew with foreign drama production experience, 2001

Victorian production workers showed the greatest movement. Nearly three-quarters of the sample (74 per cent) had worked on Queensland-based productions and 26 per cent on NSW-based productions. Altogether 90 per cent of Victorian-based production crew who have worked on foreign production have done so outside of Victoria.

Louisa Coppel of Film Victoria's Melbourne Film Office commented on the drain in skilled production personnel from Victoria when foreign production work increased in Queensland and NSW: "Many Queensland crew were Crawford's ex-staffers. Those who wanted to work on big projects were

<sup>10</sup> ABS, *Film and Video Production and Distribution* (cat 8679.0), 1999-2000.

moving to NSW and those who wanted the constant steady employment went to Queensland. Part of the reasoning behind building the (Dockland) studio and the incentive program, and increasing the level of funding for local projects, was to stop the talent drain from Victoria."

Queensland-based production personnel on the other hand showed little interstate movement. According to Robin James of the Pacific Film and Television Commission, production personnel who work in the studios on the Gold Coast see their alternative production location as LA rather than Sydney. It could also reflect the high volume of foreign TV drama work available in Queensland and the continuity of employment it provides.

### Types of foreign projects worked on

The survey of production crew showed a high level of overlap between work on foreign TV drama and feature films: while 71 per cent of the crew surveyed had experience on a foreign TV drama and 64 per cent on a foreign feature film (Table 2), 42 per cent had worked on *both* a foreign feature and a foreign TV drama. Foreign TV commercial production was less common among the production crews interviewed (which was predictable, as foreign drama experience was the basis of selection for the survey).<sup>11</sup>

Table 2. Type of foreign projects worked on in the last five years among crew with foreign drama experience

	At least 1 project of this type	Foreign experience includes... 1 or 2 projects of this type	More than 2 projects of this type	Foreign experience does not include this type of production
Foreign feature films	64% <sup>1</sup>	36%	28%	36%
Foreign TV drama	71% <sup>1</sup>	36%	35%	29%
Foreign TV commercials	35%	5%	30%	65%

Source: Australian Film Commission, survey of crew with foreign drama production experience, 2001 (no. = 161)

Notes:

<sup>1</sup> 42 per cent had some experience on both foreign TV drama and foreign features.

**By state:** The type of foreign production experience and the amount of foreign production experience varied for production crew in different states (see Table 3).

NSW respondents were more likely than those in other states to have worked on a foreign feature film (79 per cent compared with 48 per cent of Victorians, 56 per cent Queenslanders and 11 per cent in other states). Given the dominance of feature film production at Fox Studios in the last five years this is not surprising. NSW-based crew's experience with foreign TV drama was less common. 58 per cent reported working on at least one foreign TV drama. Just under half of the NSW crew surveyed (45 per cent) had worked on a foreign TV commercial in the last five years.

In Queensland, where the Gold Coast studios produce a steady slate of TV drama, more than 90 per cent of production crew with foreign production experience had worked on at least one TV drama, 72 per cent on more than two. Slightly more than half had some foreign feature film experience. Only 22 per cent had worked on a foreign TVC in the last five years, suggesting little overlap between TVC production and drama production in Queensland.

Less than half the Victorian crew with foreign production experience had worked on a foreign feature in the last five years. Most of those had worked on one or two, and only a few on more than two. Foreign TV drama was the more common production experience for these Victorian-based production personnel: 45 per cent had worked on more than two foreign TV dramas and a further 39 per cent on one or two. As in Queensland, the majority of Victorian crew had not worked on foreign TVCs.

<sup>11</sup> The sample was drawn from practitioners listed in *The Production Book 2001* who had a foreign drama production credit within the last five years.

Table 3. Type of foreign project worked on among crew with foreign production experience, by state

	At least 1 project of this type	Foreign experience includes... 1 or 2 projects of this type	More than 2 projects of this type	Foreign experience does not include this type of production
Crew based in NSW (N=83)				
Foreign feature films	79%	40%	39%	21%
Foreign TV drama	58%	41%	17%	42%
Foreign TV commercials	45%	2%	43%	54%
Crew based in Victoria (N=33)				
Foreign feature films	48%	36%	12%	52%
Foreign TV drama	84%	39%	45%	16%
Foreign TV commercials	24%	3%	21%	76%
Crew based in Queensland (N=36)				
Foreign feature films	56%	31%	25%	44%
Foreign TV drama	94%	22%	72%	6%
Foreign TV commercials	22%	11%	11%	78%
Crew based in other states (N=9)				
Foreign feature films	11%	11%	–	89%
Foreign TV drama	55%	33%	22%	44%
Foreign TV commercials	33%	11%	22%	67%

Source: Australian Film Commission, survey of crew with foreign drama production experience, 2001

Notes: N refers to the number of respondents.

The data on production spending in chapter 1 shows a low level of foreign drama production outside the eastern states, and foreign production drama credits were rare in the other states and territories. An interview with a booking agent in South Australia suggested that foreign drama production comprised only about one per cent of the bookings made for freelance crew clients; foreign TVCs were reportedly the most common form of foreign production undertaken in that state. Among the nine crew interviewed from South Australia, Western Australia and the Northern Territory, only one had worked on a foreign feature film. Five had worked on a TV drama and three had worked on a foreign TVC. All the drama productions were outside their home state (see Table 2, page 25).

#### Use of Australian department heads by offshore productions

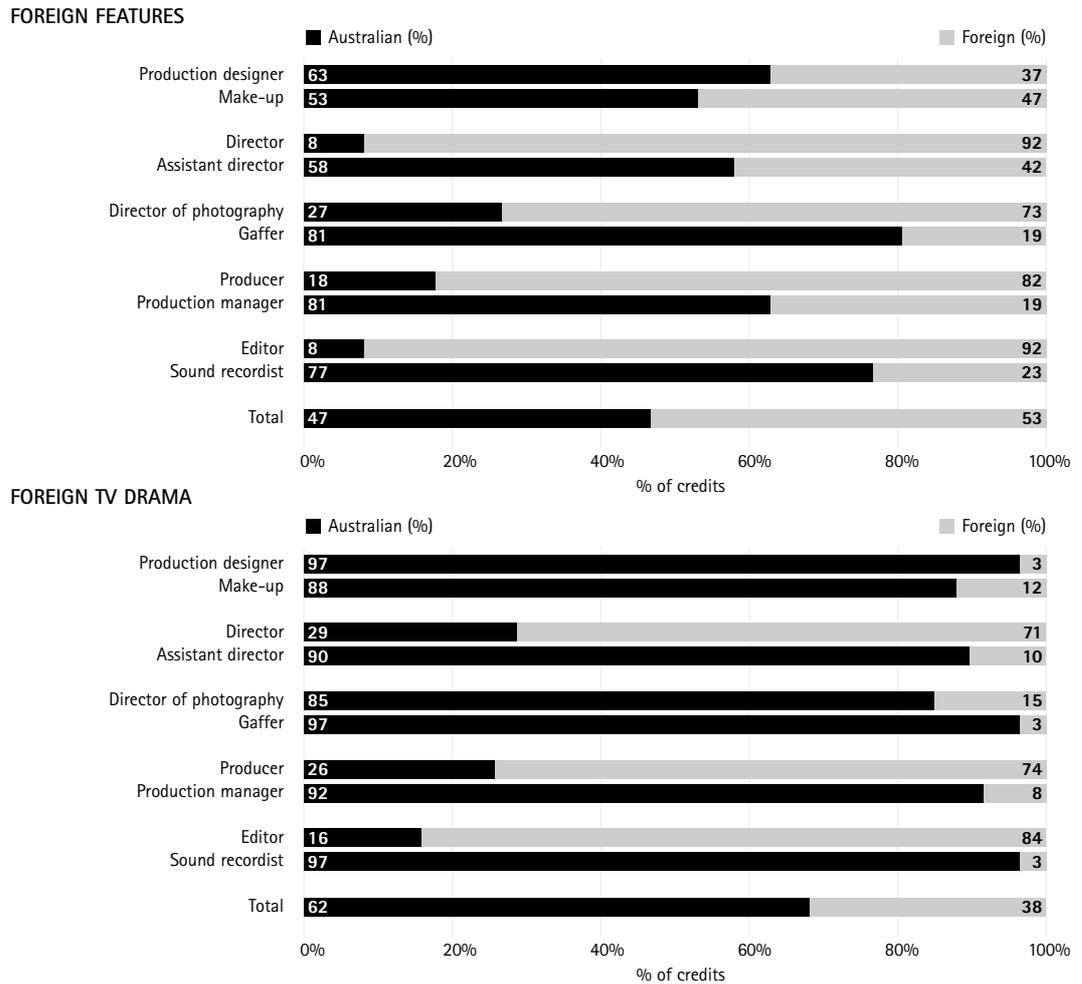
An analysis of the credits for foreign productions shot in Australia in the last five years was used to assess the frequency of department head positions being filled by Australians. 13 foreign feature films and 31 foreign TV dramas were analysed (Figure 8).

On the whole, roles were filled by Australians more frequently on foreign TV drama productions (62 per cent of the time) than on foreign features (47 per cent). In both cases, department heads tend to be more often sourced from offshore than 'technician' roles.

The exception is production designers and art directors, who were more often Australians. One explanation for the higher use of Australians in this role could be the importance of the production designer's relationship with the set construction crew, who are usually Australian.

Most **foreign features** are directed by a foreign director, and despite the high reputation of Australian directors of photography (DOPs), only 27 per cent of foreign features used an Australian in this role. The close creative relationship between the director and DOP on set means a foreign director is more likely to want a director of photography with whom they have an established relationship or confidence. Foreign directors are therefore more likely to nominate a foreign DOP.

Figure 8. Nationality of crew filling various roles



Source: Australian Film Commission, analysis of credits for 13 foreign features and 31 foreign TV dramas shot in Australia 1996–2001

Only a small number of Australian editors work on foreign features. A number of factors are likely to influence the post-production location. One that has been suggested is a desire by studios executives to have greater control of the cutting. Another explanation could be the foreign director's desire to return to home base and work with an editor with whom there is an established relationship. Australian directors working overseas have brought post-production back to Australia for similar reasons – Peter Weir, Bruce Beresford and Scott Hicks, for example.

Not surprisingly, Australian producer involvement was also low on most foreign features, and most of the other crew positions were filled by Australian freelancers.

In terms of **foreign television drama**, nearly all production designers on the productions analysed were Australian, as were the vast majority of directors of photography. Directors, producers and editors were more likely to be Australian than on foreign features, but the majority were still sourced offshore.

There was some suggestion in the research that foreign producers are increasingly confident about using Australians as department heads. The LA producers interviewed had all been involved in a production shot in Australia in the last two years, and five had not used any foreign production personnel on their most recent production. As one producer said, 'It would defeat the whole purpose economically'. Eleven producers said they had brought in a head of department on their last production, mainly directors, and visual effects supervisors. Most producers of television productions imported one or two department heads. Australian line producer Carol Hughes noted that production accountants were often brought in: "From our point of view that's probably quite a good thing, because it is the studio's money and makes us feel very comfortable."

Further suggestion of increasing use of Australian personnel in key creative roles was gained from the crew survey. Around a third of the crew said they had never worked for a foreign head of department (Table 4). Just over half said they had a foreign department head sometimes or about half the time. A minority (10 per cent) said they usually or always had a foreign department head.

The interviews with LA producers indicated that the more US producers build trust relationships with Australian producers and production managers and have more exposure to Australians crews and creative talent, the more likely they are to choose Australians to fill the key creative roles on their productions.

Table 4. Prevalence of foreign heads of department

	Proportion of crew (N=96) <sup>1</sup>
Worked for a foreign head of department on foreign productions:	
Never	34%
Sometimes	40%
About 50:50	16%
Usually	7%
Always	3%

Source: Australian Film Commission, survey of crew with foreign drama production experience, 2001

Note:

N refers to number of respondents.

1 Excluding heads of departments.

### Foreign and domestic production work

A key concern often raised in relation to crew capacity is the impact of increased competition from foreign productions for the most experienced crew. There is a view that two separate industries exist within the Australian production industry: one group of production personnel who work fairly exclusively on offshore productions and another group who work on local productions.

The survey results did not support this view (Table 5). Most of those working on foreign productions have worked on both foreign and local production in the last five years. Foreign production was the dominant source of work for around a quarter (26 per cent) of those interviewed. For around a third (36 per cent) foreign production represents a quarter or less of their work. The remainder fairly evenly share their work between local and offshore production. On average, across the whole sample, crew reported worked on foreign productions 48 per cent of the time.

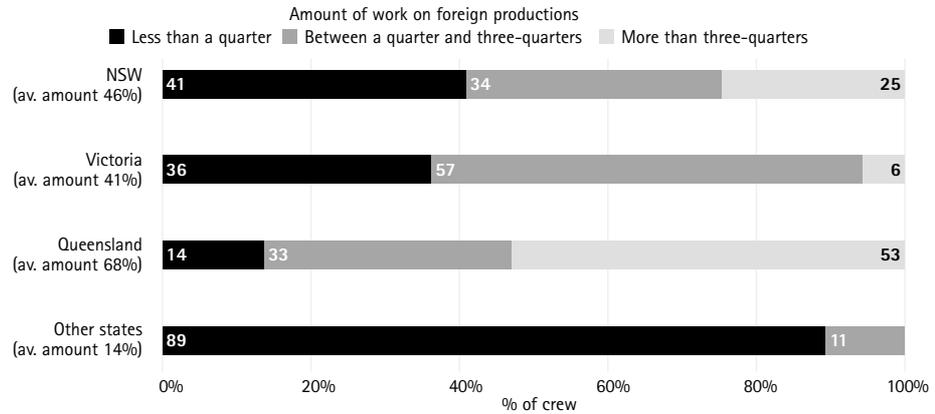
Table 5. Balance between work on local and foreign production among Australian crew with foreign drama experience

	Proportion of crew
Amount of work on foreign productions:	
less than 25%	36%
26%-50%	22%
51%-75%	16%
more than 75%	26%
<i>Average across all respondents: 48%</i>	

Source: Australian Film Commission, survey of crew with foreign drama production experience, 2001

**By state:** The balance between domestic and foreign work varied across the different production centres, presumably depending on the availability of each type of production work (Figure 9). For the NSW-based freelancers, 41 per cent reported spending less than a quarter of their time on offshore productions, a similar proportion to those in Victoria (36 per cent). However, in Victoria, the number working principally on foreign production were quite small (6 per cent); in NSW it was 25 per cent. By contrast, 53 per cent of freelance personnel based in Queensland said they gained the majority of their work from offshore productions. For most of those in SA or WA, foreign production generally made up less than a quarter of their work in the last five years.

Figure 9. Balance between work on local and foreign production among Australian crew with foreign drama experience, by state



Source: Australian Film Commission, survey of crew with foreign drama production experience, 2001

**By production department:** Among those with foreign production experience there was wide variation across the broad craft areas in the proportion of work that was foreign (Table 6). Special effects and CGI personnel appear the most likely to have foreign production as the dominant component of their work. For camera crew, art department and production office staff, foreign production on average makes up around half their work. Editors (both sound and picture) were the least likely to rely on foreign production work. Directors and sound recordists also reported a low percentage of foreign production work.

Table 6. Average proportion of time spent working on foreign production by crew in various production departments

	Average % time on foreign productions
Special effects/CGI (N=11)	69%
Camera department (N=38)	50%
Production (N=25)	50%
Art department (N=39)	48%
Directing (N=23)	41%
Sound recording (N=11)	41%
Editing (picture and sound) (N=13)	36%
Whole sample (N=160)	48%

Source: Australian Film Commission, survey of crew with foreign drama production experience, 2001  
 Notes: N refers to number of respondents.

**Competition for crew: What attracts good crew?**

*I'm getting my Australian film up; the challenge I'm facing is to get good crew to work on it for Aussie rates. They're getting too used to the American rates.*

Australian director

Concerns have been raised that higher crew pay on foreign productions poses a threat to the ability of local productions to attract experienced crew. Certainly the research suggests most crew believe they receive better financial rewards on foreign productions (see chapter 4, page 39). The importance of pay rate in determining local productions' access to crew is, however, not as clear. The research shows that crew who work on foreign productions also work on local productions. Some state agency representatives interviewed for this report claim many production crew will work for less pay to support local productions. They felt this was effectively a hidden subsidy of the local industry by Australian production workers. The better pay on foreign productions means they can afford to take some local production work at a lower rate.

*People of really high quality work on local productions. They will take the cut in pay because they like that project.*

**Influences mentioned:** The crew survey explored these propositions with crew members. Most respondents acknowledged that they considered a number of things when making a job decision (Figure 10). From the list of attributes presented, 'team on the project' was the most commonly endorsed factor, cited by 95 per cent of key creative crew and 91 per cent of others. Around 80 per cent of all respondents nominated pay and opportunity to gain new skills. The level of creative control was mentioned more often by key creative crew (92 per cent) than other crew (72 per cent), and the same was true of the script (cited by 82 per cent of key creative crew and 64 per cent of others). Location of the job would have some influence for just over half of the people interviewed (47 per cent of key creative crew and 60 per cent of others).

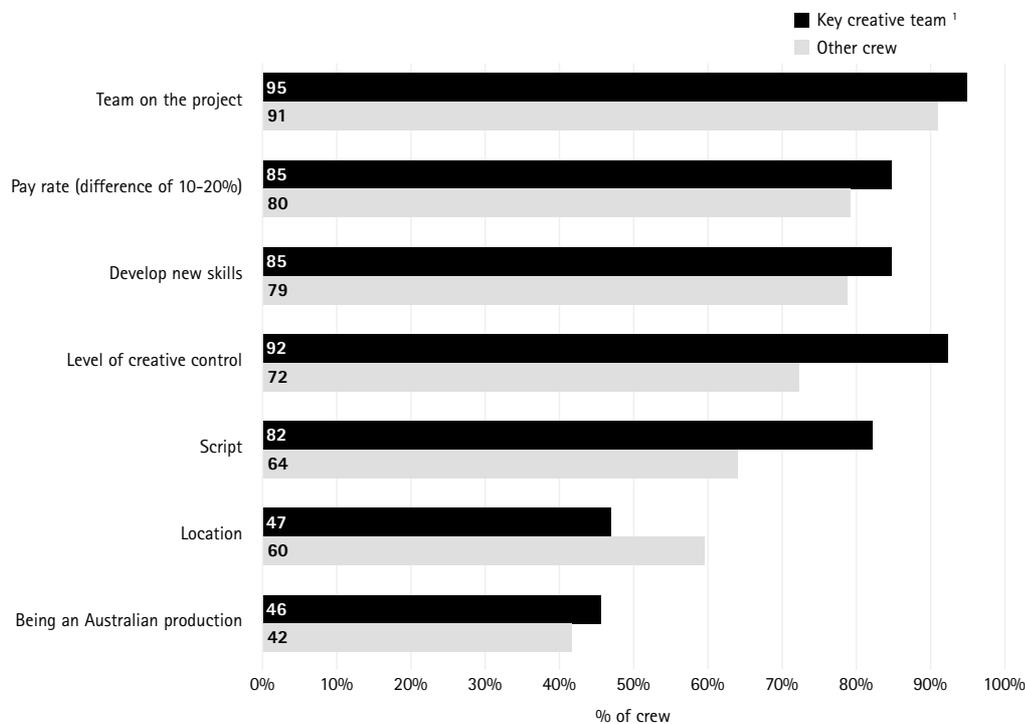
'Being an Australian production' was the factor cited least commonly, with around 40 per cent saying it would have some influence on their decision.

**Most important influence:** Crew were also asked to nominate the single most important factor for them (Figure 11). More than a third (34% per cent) of the key creative crew rated the script as the most important influence, compared with 9 per cent of the other crew. Other crew were more likely than key creative team members to nominate pay rate or 'team on the project' as the most important influence.

Level of creative control was the most important factor for another sizeable group (cited by 13–15 per cent of respondents). Being an Australian production was the most important factor for only 5 per cent of key creatives and 3 per cent of other crew.

These findings suggest no particular preference by many of the production crew to work on local production. However, the script appeal, level of creative control, and project team on a domestic production could have a major influence on their interest in a project, particularly for key creative personnel.

Figure 10. Factors that influence the decision to take a production job



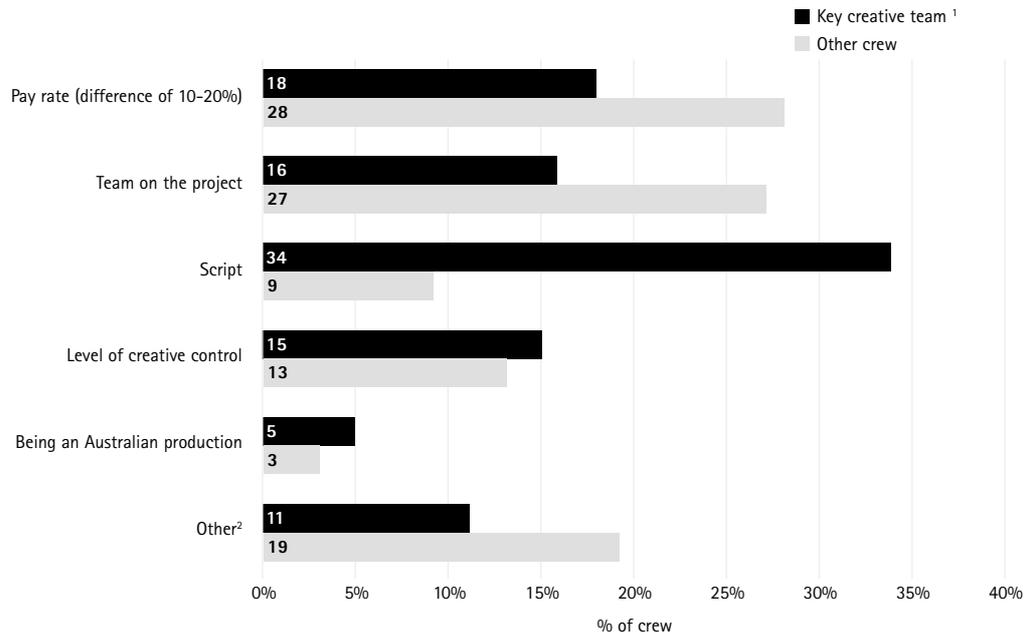
Source: Australian Film Commission, survey of crew with foreign drama production experience, 2001

Notes:

Percentages do not add up to 100 per cent because each respondent could list a number of factors.

1 'Key creative team' includes roles such as director, production designer, director of photography, producer and editor.

Figure 11. Most important influence on a decision to take a job, by type of crew role



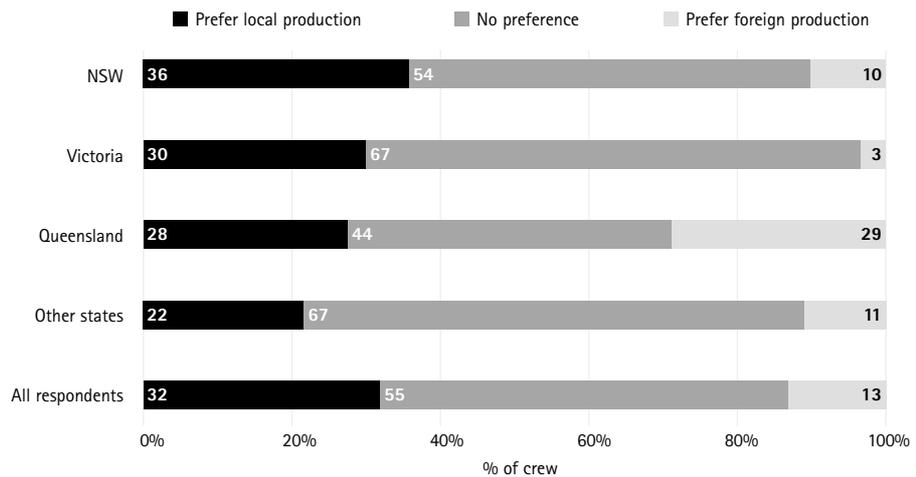
Source: Australian Film Commission, survey of crew with foreign drama production experience, 2001

Notes:

- 1 'Key creative team' includes roles such as director, production designer, director of photography, producer and editor.
- 2 'Other' includes location of job, opportunity to develop new skills, and other influences.

**Preference for local productions:** When directly asked whether they had a preference for foreign or local production, nearly a third of the crew opted for local production, compared with 13 per cent who said they would prefer to work on a foreign production. More than half, however, had no preference. Preference for foreign production was more common among crew based in Queensland (Figure 12).

Figure 12. Preference for foreign or local production work, by home base of crew



Source: Australian Film Commission, survey of crew with foreign drama production experience, 2001

The main reason given for a preference for local production was a desire to contribute to the local industry and its greater cultural relevance in the story telling (21 respondents out of the 71 who expressed a preference for local production). Ten said local production provided greater continuity of work and another 10 said they had greater job satisfaction on local productions. Others simply find it more enjoyable and some find they are more comfortable with the system and production culture. Other reasons include a preference for the local crews they work with and a home base for their work.

*Because that's my passion – what I've devoted my life to. I believe it's really important to preserve some sense of identity as distinct from the dominance of American culture – I've needed to keep creating films with our voice and a sense of humour that springs up from the heart, rather than being led by commercial interest and markets.*

Camera operator

*Because I think we should make fantastic films that do not emulate American films but are in essence Australian films. I'd much rather work on Praise and Lantana than I would on a 100 American films, because they are particularly Australian. It's more satisfying to work on things like that than just pursue the dollar.*

Sound editor

In contrast, the main attraction for those who said they preferred foreign productions was the pay and the continuity of work. Often they added that they would like to work on Australian stories but find their craft skills are restricted by the local production budgets. The budget range of local productions was therefore an obstacle for some.

*Because offshore money allows me to work with the toys I want to work with and work with the scripts I want to do. Although I would prefer to work on local productions, their budgets just don't let me do what I want to do.*

Director

Local producers and production managers were asked whether they thought foreign productions took priority over local productions when crewing a project. Around half the producers/production managers felt foreign productions tended to take priority for local crew. A number pointed out this was because freelance crew were choosing foreign productions because of the higher pay and/or more continuity of work (a point supported by the crew survey). The kudos associated with large studio productions was also perceived by producers to be a factor in crew's choice of productions.

### **Opportunities for new entrants**

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Most Australian producers and production managers (18 out of 19) felt foreign productions were creating opportunities for new entrants and less experienced crew. Similarly, state agency representatives in the eastern states shared a positive assessment of the role of foreign productions in creating opportunities for new players. Louisa Coppel of Film Victoria's Melbourne Film Office felt there was a positive side to the high demand for crew generated by foreign productions: "A squeeze can be good because if you don't get that squeeze occasionally, you don't bring new people in."

These opportunities are being created in a number of ways. Some Australian producers spoke about the length of the shoot on foreign productions giving people the chance to build their skills and demonstrate their potential to other members of the team. With more time to prove themselves, those who were successful might then be recommended for a more senior role in future productions.

The development of trust between offshore producers and local heads of department tends to lead to a widening of the pool of talent from which production personnel are now being drawn. As producer Andrew Mason noted: "Sheer continuity of work means trust is developed and people get to act in more senior roles, and on the next film they move up the production structure."

As a major production site for foreign television drama, Warner Roadshow Studios on the Gold Coast provides an example of the role of foreign productions in the industry's training process. Darryl Sheen, a producer with Coote/Hayes Productions and a 12-year veteran of working on foreign productions at the studios, emphasised the importance placed on developing local crew. He likened the development experience at Warner Roadshow Studios to Crawford's in the 70s. Through formal on-the-job training such as industry attachments or internships, and informally through working on the job, crew were given the chance to develop their skills. The volume of work and continuity of the employment were seen as critical factors in providing opportunities for less experienced crew to learn by practice and demonstrate their competency to more senior crew members. Sheen reported

examples of production crew progressing through the production ranks with the experience they gained on foreign productions. "People are always moving up the production chain," he said.

The large budgets of many foreign productions also create opportunities for new entrants. Large budgets mean larger crew size – in particular, a large number of production assistants. A Queensland booking service manager referred to *Scooby Doo* as an example of a foreign production that provided opportunities for students from Bond University as fourth assistant directors. However, not everyone felt that these big-budget films offered useful skill development: "Yes, [people get opportunities]" said one Australian producer, "but only in a very minor role working as a slave."

Foreign productions were also perceived to create opportunities for new entrants indirectly. By creating a higher demand for the most experienced and established crew, they force local productions to consider a wider network of production personnel, which means less experienced crew are gaining more opportunities in local productions. The NSW FTO commented that talented graduates of the Australian Film, Television and Radio School were now getting opportunities on bigger Australian feature films because more established department heads were working on foreign productions. This trend, however, was not always seen in a positive light by local production office personnel. "Foreign productions suck up all the most experienced crew and the local productions get the shortfall," said an Australian production manager.

The next chapter further explores the role of foreign productions in the professional development of Australian crew, and the quality of the experience for those involved.

## CHAPTER 4. AUSTRALIAN CREW'S EXPERIENCE ON FOREIGN PRODUCTIONS

*This chapter explores the experience of working on foreign productions from the crew's perspective, including financial rewards, opportunities for learning new skills, career development and effects on job satisfaction.*

### Summary

- 78 per cent of crew interviewed acknowledged differences between foreign and local productions, with 39 per cent pointing to greater demarcation between specific roles and a more hierarchical structure. Other differences indicated include bigger budgets (noted by 36 per cent), longer hours (30 per cent) and bigger scale (21 per cent).
- 41 per cent of crew believed the major benefit of working on a foreign production was having a bigger budget to realise their creative goals. Other major benefits included an increased level of pay (38 per cent), learning of new skills (24 per cent) and continuity of employment (21 per cent).
- When specifically asked whether they had learned new skills, 64 per cent said they had. These new skills mainly related to technology (46 per cent), new creative processes and the ability to expand on their craft due to bigger budgets.
- Most local crew (86 per cent) felt foreign producers and crew had learned egalitarian and efficient work practices from the Australian crew. This finding was strongly reiterated by interviews with LA producers.
- The majority of crew (69 per cent) found difficulties working on foreign productions, ranging from lack of respect from foreign heads of department and being treated like cogs in the wheel (45 per cent) to a lack of control or empowerment over decision-making and creative processes (28 per cent).
- 43 per cent of crew surveyed believed that foreign production was vital for maintaining employment, while 17 per cent emphasised the symbiotic relationship between foreign production and local production. Significantly though, 19 per cent commented on the poor state of local production and 10 per cent expressed concerns about the potentially damaging impact on the Australian industry.

While increased employment has positive economic value both at the individual and national level, the value of foreign productions in the development of the nation's creative infrastructure relates more to the professional and creative development of the production personnel.

The crew survey explored the views of those who have worked on foreign productions, covering:

- perceived differences between local and foreign productions
- perceived benefits and difficulties of working on foreign productions
- job satisfaction
- the role of foreign production in the Australian industry.

### Perceived differences

An examination of the perceived differences in the production experience and work practices between local and foreign productions can help assess the distinctive contribution foreign productions offer to production crew. Such an analysis can also provide insights into potential learning opportunities these productions provide.

Table 7. Perceived differences in production practice on foreign productions

	Number who commented	Proportion (%) N=128
More compartmentalised/hierarchy/demarcation	51	39%
Budgets bigger	46	36%
Working hours longer	38	30%
Type of production culture	38	30%
Scale bigger	27	21%
Committee /studio decision making	13	10%
Use of high level of technology	11	9%
Financial reporting requirement/more paperwork/more accountability/more business like	10	8%
New skills required	7	5%

Source: Australian Film Commission, survey of crew with foreign drama production experience, 2001

Note:

Percentages do not add up to 100 per cent because each respondent could list a number of factors.

N refers to number of respondents.

Most of those interviewed (78 per cent) acknowledged differences between foreign and local production practices. Many noted country to country differences in production norms, comparing Asian companies' production work with that of US companies. While some participants had worked for production companies from a number of countries, the reference point for most was US feature or TV drama production compared to the local equivalent.

A common theme was the difference in the way the production crew worked. A team member's role was seen as more compartmentalised and defined on a foreign production. Greater demarcation between roles and a more hierarchical structure of the production crew was the experience of many, contrasted with the more holistic team approach taken on Australian productions. This difference was noted by someone in each of the production departments, although costume and wardrobe crew were more likely than others to raise it.

Most local crew (86 per cent) felt that foreign producers and crew had learned egalitarian and efficient work practices from the Australian crew. This was strongly reiterated by interviews with LA producers (see page 19).

Others perceived the differences as a function of production budgets (36 per cent). Camera department and electrics crew more commonly mentioned this issue. While bigger budgets were generally viewed as a favourable difference, they were seen by some as affecting the efficiency of production practices. Some production crew were critical of what they perceived to be wasteful and inefficient practices on foreign productions. 'Money rather than initiative' was seen as a defining difference between Australian and foreign productions.

*Australians have more initiative; to the Americans if it's not in the truck it can't be done.*

Camera operator

*If there is a problem, money is thrown at it rather than creatively resolving it by talking about the possibilities.*

Editor

*Americans want things done quickly and are more flexible due to dollar backing.*

Camera operator

However, as one Australian producer explained, what some crew perceive as inefficiencies could actually be delivering improved efficiency overall when above-the-line costs such as set time for 'stars' are factored into the equation.

Murray Pope, of the visual effects company Animal Logic, sees a difference between abundance (US) and the ability to adapt (Aust): "American crews are larger, use more technology and can't cope with just getting by," he said, "but Australian crew are used to coping."

Almost one-third of respondents felt the key difference was the production culture of the studio model compared to Australian production culture. The studio model was described as a more business-like and commercial in its approach to production, and some described it as placing a greater emphasis on product for a market than on the art of cinema.

*It's more like a 'sausage factory' when you work on foreign production ... less creativity and less variety.*

Sound recordist

*[Foreign production puts] more emphasis on the audience, the market and the business of making films.*

Sound editor

This difference in production culture was sometimes seen as detrimental to the creative process. Specific differences in the definition of roles were noticed by some directors. These were seen as reducing a director's creative involvement.

*Often the story editor is the EP [executive producer] and they have a hands-on role. They do the casting and run concept and production meetings, and they're across all sorts of production decisions like set design. The EP takes on a lot of creative decisions which normally fall in the director's hands here.*

Director

*A lot of foreign DOPs [directors of photography] don't use the camera ... they use camera operators.*

Director

The difference in daily hours of work was raised by 30 per cent of respondents. On foreign productions, particularly the US productions, 12-hour days are the norm, whereas the Australian daily standard is 10 hours. Producers explained that longer days helped reduce the costs associated with equipment and studio hire, as well as days on location for imported cast and crew. Australian crew generally receive overtime for the two hours extra a day they work on foreign productions.

One in five saw production scale as a defining difference, which was also viewed by some as having implications for the production practices adopted. Heads of department on foreign productions were seen as taking on larger tasks, budgets and crew, requiring a more managerial approach. Producers were more likely to raise the difference of scale when drawing comparisons with local production practices.

The chain of command in the decision-making process was a key distinguishing feature for a number of department heads.

*Every decision needs to be OKed by the committee.*

Production designer

*Many more producers with a point of view and guiding the decision.*

Editor

Some saw these differences as related to the different sources of finance in each industry. As producer Andrew Mason noted, "In Australia the business is built up as a director business, [with] government money. The idea of outside approval for something is a pretty foreign concept. If a director likes something you go with it. Working on a film for a major studio, the studio will have overall approval of everything unless the director is very high-profile, and therefore powerful ... Both financial and legal approvals are much greater on the major studio productions."

Related to the approval process was the increase in paperwork, budgeting and financial reporting on foreign productions that 10 (8 per cent) of the respondents saw as a key difference. These comments came from a variety of departments.

The use of high-level technology was specifically referred to as a distinctive feature of foreign production work by a small number (9 per cent) of respondents, mainly in post-production and camera departments as well as producers and production managers.

Some editors noted differences in technical standards between Australia and US but the most common distinction mentioned by this group involved the effect of working at a distance from decision makers and talent, particularly the difficulty of working across different time zones. Some post-production sound crew also referred to requirements for more 'temp' mixes as a key difference. This was felt to be driven by the use of test screenings of US films and programs.

Seven of the crew specifically referred to the new skills needed for foreign production work. This was raised across a variety of departments including costume, editing and digital effects as well as by a first assistant director.

### Perceived benefits

Most of the crew interviewed saw benefits in working on foreign production and some came up with a list of benefits (see Table 8).

Table 8. Benefits of working on foreign productions

	Number who commented	Proportion (%) N=161
Bigger budget/more money available	66	41%
Level of pay	61	38%
Learning new skills	39	24%
Employment/continuity of employment	33	21%
Status/visibility of credit	25	16%
Scale bigger	22	14%
People you work with (top)	22	14%
Test out new equipment and techniques/high level of technology to work with	18	12%
Higher production values	10	6%
Type of production culture	9	6%
Other	11	7%
No benefits	8	5%

Source: Australian Film Commission, survey of crew with foreign drama production experience, 2001

Note: Percentages do not add up to 100 per cent because each respondent could list a number of benefits.

N refers to number of respondents.

### Bigger budgets

Working with a bigger budget was a major attraction. Forty-one per cent of those interviewed referred to this as a distinct benefit, with many commenting that more money meant they were better able to realise their creative goals onscreen. Producers, directors and editors raised this benefit more often than personnel from special effects and make-up departments.

*With an Australian budget, it's finite. You start with the bottom line and work backwards. But with an American production if someone comes up with a good idea the money's usually forthcoming.*

Australian producer

*More time and more money, more personnel means that you can do a really good job rather than banging them out. You're allowed time to experiment with shots and sequences.*

Editor

Related to bigger budgets was larger scale and access to top-end technology. The ability to work on a larger scale was raised by some production workers as a benefit in itself, particularly by first assistant directors and producers. The opportunity to work with top-end production technology was noted as a benefit by 18 respondents, mainly directors.

Murray Pope, of Animal Logic, sees particular benefits for the local industry in the bigger budgets

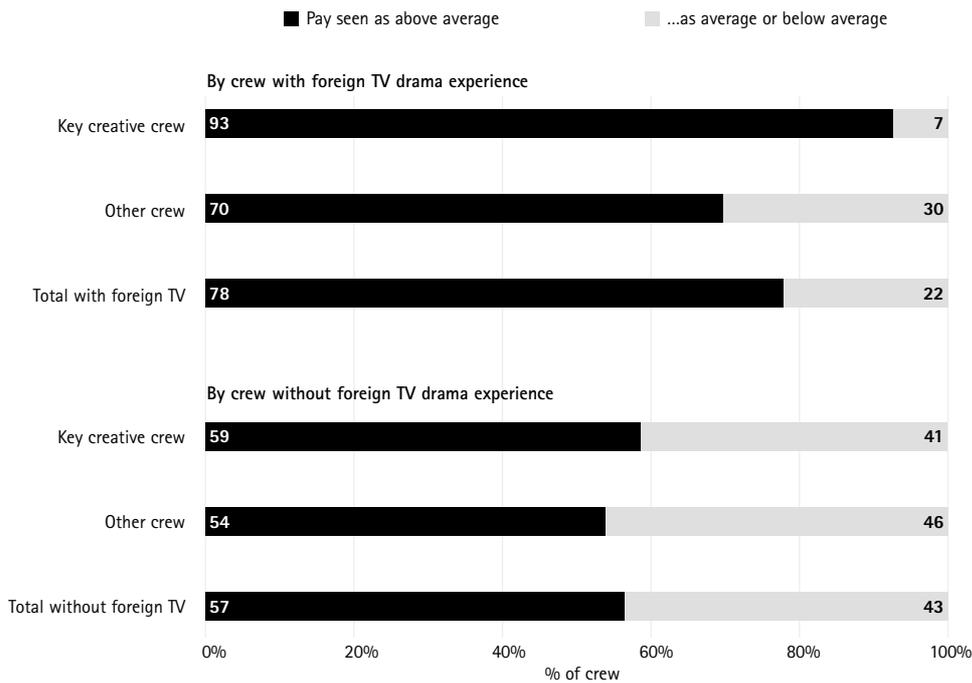
available for special effects on some foreign productions. "For example, there is no history of animatronics use in Australian television as large as for *Farscape*," he said. "*Farscape* has a budget to employ a full crew; they create new props and sets each week, which is unheard-of in local production."

### Higher pay

Although pay was not always cited as the most important reason for taking a job, particularly for key creative crew (see chapter 3, page 31), higher pay was the second most frequently reported 'top of mind' benefit of working on foreign productions, mentioned by 38 per cent of respondents. Directors, directors of photography and sound recordists raised this point more often than others such as digital effects creators, production managers and first assistant directors.

When crew were specifically asked whether the financial rewards on foreign productions were 'above average', 'average' or 'below average', nearly three-quarters said they were above average. All directors and most (92 per cent) of directors of photography rated pay on foreign production above average, while a more mixed response came from digital effects creators (54 per cent) and make-up artists (53 per cent). Generally those who had worked on foreign television drama more often rated the financial rewards higher irrespective of the role they performed (Figure 13), although those working in key creative roles were the most likely to report higher than average financial rewards.

Figure 13. Perceived financial rewards of working on foreign productions, by production role and type of foreign drama experience



Source: Australian Film Commission, survey of crew with foreign drama production experience, 2001

When production crew who mentioned higher pay were asked how *much* higher, they gave a range of responses, from 10 per cent higher to 400 per cent higher. The mean response was '62 per cent higher' than local production pay.

The degree of difference varied depending on production role, with directors the most likely to express the view that it was much higher (Table 9). Many directors said they received double (100 per cent more) and one reported receiving five times as much as on local productions. Membership of Directors Guild of America was noted as the reason for the higher rate. Sound recordists and post-production workers also provided estimates of higher rates greater than those suggested by other craft groups.

Table 9. Degree to which pay for foreign production work is higher than for local production work, as estimated by production crew in various departments

	Average pay difference (foreign over local production)
Directing (N=18)	139% higher
Sound recording (N=8)	72% higher
Post-production (N =11)	57% higher
Production (N=14)	39% higher
Camera department (N=24)	5% higher
Art department (N=28)	3% higher
Overall (N=103)	62% higher

Source: Australian Film Commission, survey of crew with foreign drama production experience, 2001

Notes: N refers to number of respondents.

The booking service managers interviewed varied in their perceptions of the differences in pay between foreign and local productions. Some felt there was no difference as the local production managers know the local rates and don't put them up just because it is an offshore production. One booking service manager felt that US productions had previously paid higher rates but that this had changed and crew were no longer getting the level of pay of a few years ago.

A number of crew and booking services managers said the actual rate of pay was the same but the overtime involved in working 12-hour days meant they received a higher financial return for offshore jobs.

Some producers felt the difference in pay between local and foreign productions reflected differences in scale and responsibility, noting that heads of department on a foreign production may be responsible for more crew and more money than the entire budget on most local productions. Under this view, it is the difference in budget and scale that is the key determinant of the higher rate of pay, not the production being foreign. Some producers felt it was not appropriate for crew to expect the same rate of pay on a low-budget local production. Foreign productions were seen as making higher demands on crew. As one crew member commented: 'They get blood out of you.'

#### Industrial agreements

Freelance Australian film and television technicians are all covered by the Motion Picture Production Agreement (MPAA) negotiated by the Media, Entertainment and Arts Alliance (MEAA) and the Screen Producers Association of Australia.

This agreement sets out minimum rates for a range of role classifications from Director (features and mini-series) at Level 10 to Grip at Level 5 and Runner at Level 1. Variations are generally negotiated on a case by case basis to reflect market rates. According to the MEAA, market rates for some upper-level roles on offshore feature films, particularly bigger-budget films, can tend to be higher than for those on local productions. However, for television series productions, the MEAA suggests that negotiated market rates on offshore productions are not dissimilar to local productions.

Screen technicians employed on productions which take place at Fox Studios or which use Fox's production services company, Moore Park Production Services, are covered by the Fox/MEAA Crew Agreement. This specifies its own minimum rates of pay but is, according to the MEAA, largely similar to the MPAA. One of the differences is that under the Fox agreement, the maximum contracted working hours may be extended from 10 to 12 hours.

Actors' minimum rates on film and television productions differ significantly depending on whether the work is for television or film, and whether it is an offshore production, a co-production or a local production. This is due to the existence of agreements negotiated by the MEAA with SAG (Screen Actors Guild of America), ACTRA (Alliance of Canadian Cinema, Television and Radio Artists) and British Equity.

Sources: Media, Entertainment and Arts Alliance (MEAA) <http://www.alliance.org.au>; 'Offshore Film and Television Productions: Summary Sheet' (<http://www.alliance.org.au/equity/offshore.htm>); 'MPPA Minimum Rates: Film & TV Freelance Technicians' (<http://www.alliance.org.au/work/staa/summary.htm>); 'The MPPA Agreement at a Glance' (<http://www.alliance.org.au/work/staa/mppacond.pdf>). 'Australian Working Conditions' (<http://www.foxstudios.com.au/professional/conditions/>)

## Learning

As earlier noted, reports on the implications of foreign production in Australia<sup>12</sup> have referred to the transfer of skills to the Australian industry as a key potential benefit. In this research, 'learning new skills' was the third most frequently reported top-of-mind benefit listed by crew (see Table 8), specifically mentioned by a quarter of respondents. Crew in most departments mentioned it, although it was more commonly raised by production designers (9 out of 16) and less so by directors (one out of 13).

When crew were specifically asked whether they had learned new skills or work practices on a foreign production, nearly two-thirds (64 per cent) felt they had. Production designers (81 per cent) and first assistant directors (80 per cent) were more likely to report new skills than make-up artists (47 per cent) or sound recordists (42 per cent). More than three-quarters of directors also reported learning new skills when specifically asked about it, despite the small number who mentioned it unprompted. It seems that factors such as bigger budgets and higher pay are more 'top-of-mind' benefits for directors than are learning opportunities.

When asked to rate the relative merit of foreign productions in terms of the learning opportunities, just over half (51 per cent) rated foreign productions as 'above average' for learning and professional development. Production designers, directors and digital effects creators were the most likely to rate this as above average. Most of the other half (41 per cent) saw foreign productions as no different from local productions for learning, and 8 per cent actually perceived foreign productions as providing less professional development opportunities. Costume designers and wardrobe were the least likely to see foreign productions as offering above-average learning opportunities.

'Learning by practice' was the main type of experience reported. Skills were commonly obtained through the opportunity to experiment with new production technologies or by working on a larger scale with bigger budgets. It was scale that mattered, not necessarily the exposure to foreign practices.

*New skills are achieved on any big-budget film whether it is foreign or Australian.*

Director of photography

One of the producers felt that this process of creative practitioners learning on big-budget foreign productions was intrinsically linked to a local production background that required initiative and experimentation to achieve production goals on limited budgets.

*You only get skills by experimenting and the larger scale gives the crew practice at doing things. The adaptability needed on Australian productions because of lack of budget reinforces the experimentation attitude of the Australian crew when they have a bigger-scale production and budget. The Australian production culture has resulted from a need to invent things ... The trick is hold on to those low-budget skills.*

Australian producer

There were examples of the transfer of specific skills, such as the animatronics expertise of Jim Henson's company on *Farscape*. Murray Pope, Executive Producer at Animal Logic, which produces the visual effects for the program, noted that after the initial training, Australian crew developed their own expertise in the technology and are now training new production personnel. Animal Logic handles visual effects for many foreign productions, from *The Matrix* to television commercials. "There are new people coming through all the time," said Pope.

However, exposure to foreign heads of department did not generally appear to be a key element. There was no difference evident in the learning of new skills and practices between those that usually or always worked to a foreign head of department and those that had never worked with a foreign department head.

Technology-related skills were reported by nearly half those who felt they had developed new skills (Table 10). Directors of photography, directors and digital effects creators were the most likely to name technology-related skills attained. The ability to expand craft skills and explore new creative

<sup>12</sup> Malcolm Long and Associates, *A Bigger Slice of the Pie: Policy Options for a More Competitive International Film and Television Production Industry in Australia*, AusFILM, November 2000.

processes with larger budgets was noted by a sizeable minority.

*You are expanding your skill base because everything is bigger – bigger budgets mean more toys mean more opportunity to expand craft.*

Director

Administering bigger budgets and handling studio approval processes was reported as a new skill by 21 per cent of personnel. Some also referred to the management skills they had gained (16 per cent) and communicational skills for dealing with committees or studios. Around 10 per cent felt they had gained new techniques for working more efficiently and some felt their key learning was dealing with the stress and pressure associated with some foreign productions.

Table 10. Skills obtained on foreign productions

	Number who commented	Proportion (%) N=106
Technology related skills e.g. CGI	49	46%
New creative processes	24	23%
Expand own craft with bigger budget/ crew	25	23%
Administering big budgets/approval processes	22	21%
Management skills	16	16%
Working faster/more efficiently	11	10%
Communication skills for dealing with committee/studio/ other cultures	11	10%
Skills in dealing with stress/learning to survive	6	6%
American production system	5	5%

Source: Australian Film Commission, survey of crew with foreign drama production experience, 2001  
Notes: N refers to number of respondents.

The skills learnt varied across departments. Camera and directing departments were more likely to list new technology skills; production department personnel were more likely to mention budgeting expertise and management skills. Managing the approval process from offshore was noted by some production and art department crew.

When LA producers were asked what they thought the crew had learnt from them and their foreign department heads, few felt they were in a position to answer. One LA producer noted that learning how to work within a studio system was a new experience for many Australian crew.

*[When you work for a major studio], you're working with a many-headed beast. Most [in Australia] are used to a single producer and know where to go for answers, but with a major studio production unless you're used to it, it can be quite frustrating as you have to check with the rep from Warner, the rep from Village Roadshow, the director etc. You have to get so many clearances it's a very different way of working.*

LA producer

### Contacts and kudos, continuity and time

Working with 'stars' and top international talent was a major attraction for some (14 per cent) and credits on major Hollywood feature films were top-of-mind benefits for others (16 per cent). A foreign credit was often seen as helpful for career development as it improved job prospects for other big films or work opportunities outside Australia. People also felt that their work would be seen by larger audiences both in Australia and internationally. Producers and digital effects creators raised this benefit more commonly than other groups; no production designers mentioned it.

When specifically asked to rate foreign production work in terms of the new contacts and networks a majority (61 per cent) rated it 'above average'. Around a third (32 per cent) saw foreign production work as offering the usual contacts and network opportunities, while 7 per cent felt it was below average in this regard.

For a sizeable minority (21 per cent), the benefit of foreign productions is simply work or the continuity of work. This was most commonly raised by electricians department respondents, camera assistants and operators, and production managers, while no producers or directors mentioned it.

Working on productions with high production values was noted as a benefit by 6 per cent of respondents. Some post-production workers said they had extra time to do their work and saw this as a benefit. Access to foreign finance was raised by a few producers.

### Perceived difficulties

The majority of crew (69 per cent) had experienced difficulties working on foreign productions. This was more commonly reported among sound recordists (92 per cent), digital effects creators (91 per cent) and production managers (87 per cent). Ten per cent felt that the same kinds of difficulties existed on both foreign and local productions, but that the scale of any problems was the real challenge on larger projects.

Table 11. Perceived difficulties with working on foreign productions

	Number who commented	Proportion (%) N=113
Production culture/politics/attitude	50	45%
Definition of role/what you do	32	28%
Approval process / Management or communication style of head of department	31	27%
Distance	22	19%
Less creative input	15	13%
Size of the problems with the bigger scale in what you do	11	10%
Language barrier (non-English speaking foreign company)/ communication	9	8%

Source: Australian Film Commission, survey of crew with foreign drama production experience, 2001

Notes: N refers to number of respondents.

### Production culture, politics and attitude

The problem raised most frequently was 'treatment on the job'. A number of crew (45 per cent) spoke about a disrespectful attitude from foreign heads of department, sometimes described as being treated like a cog in the wheel rather than valued contributors in a creative process. Many labelled this type of treatment as being seen as 'Mexicans with mobiles'. While these complaints were found across all production roles, they were more common among camera assistants/operators and production managers/assistants. Most Australian production personnel take pride in their egalitarian attitude, cooperative way of working, love of film and inventive way of dealing with problems. When a foreign production presented an apparent affront to these values, crew tended to report difficulties.

*Some of the American producers come here and they want to treat you like a Mexican and squeeze the most out of you for as cheap as possible.*

Sound editor

*[I have difficulty with] the American attitude of 'the only way to do it is our way'. Their arrogance wears you down after a while. I guess this is more the studio-based attitude; I haven't worked on independent American films.*

Camera assistant/focus puller

*You can live without the condescension. The vibe is 'we're only using you because your cheaper'... but then they realise we do a great job.*

Sound editor

*The way the Americans play their politics is different from us ... You have to play their games. They don't understand irony.*

Sound recordist/engineer

### Definition of role

Definition of role on foreign productions was a problem for some in the production team (28 per cent). Many felt their role did not have the level of empowerment they were used to, and they had less control over decisions. This was particularly frustrating for some directors, especially those on foreign TV drama.

*Casting is done off head sheets – therefore there's no opportunity to do screen tests. Lack of post-production input is unacceptable.*

Director

*As a director [on an American TV production] I can't suggest script changes ... dialogue etc ... It's a blinkered approach to the creative process. A sense that they know their 'market' (not audience). They don't want the input. The show is product.*

Director

*They [US studios] consider that a director equals labour, whereas other countries consider the director as the creative force behind the production.*

Director

### Approval process and working at a distance from decision makers

Some (27 per cent) expressed frustration at the approval process, commenting on an environment of fear which they saw as an impediment to decision making.

*[There's] a lot more producers, decision makers. Trying to get through the quagmire of everyone's opinion is a challenge.*

Producer/line producer/co-producer

*Key person is often not here – so they get conservative because they want to cover their ass ... the invisible authority.*

Director

Working at a distance from the key decision makers was commented on by 19 per cent of respondents, from both production and post-production teams. Post-production personnel often spoke about the difficulties they faced in dealing with the distance and time shift between them and key creative cast and crew. Remoteness from key decision makers was seen a challenge for other departments as well.

A digital post-production representative highlighted the particular problems the post-production sector faces with foreign production, the main difficulty being that the work was taken back home.

*Because most foreign feature productions utilise foreign directors and producers, and those people have evolved a close-knit band of department heads, particularly in the area of post-production, there is often a desire on their part to return home for the post phase. [This is] both for personal reasons and the comfort zone of familiarity or resources, processes and proximity to studio decision makers. This means VFX [visual effects] department heads and contractors may often be substantially in place before the production arrives. If the roles were reversed, I'm sure we would act the same way.*

*The powerful force that may reverse this status quo is the new rebate scheme. Certainly I have often parted company with foreign clients and department heads at the end of a production whereupon they have commented, 'If only we had known how good you guys were down here before we came we would have structured things very differently.' Word of mouth testimonials and hard-selling are unlikely to alter this trend I feel. However, foreign projects directed or produced by Australians, plus projects by foreign producers and directors who are repeating their Oz experience a second (or more) time could be effective.*

CGI producer

Other difficulties reported included having less creative input, language problems when working on foreign projects with production companies from a non-English speaking country; concerns about safety issues on foreign production sets; pressure and stress, and technical differences related to different production standards and lack of support for crew working long shifts.

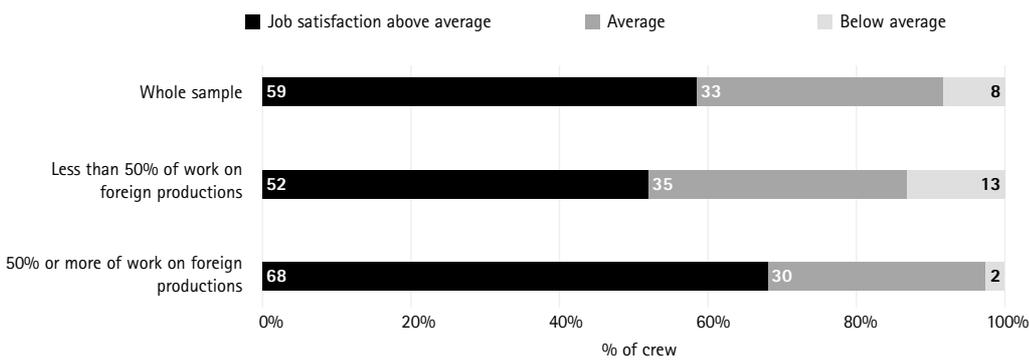
**Job satisfaction**

Only a couple of people surveyed listed job satisfaction as a distinct benefit of working on foreign productions. However, when directly probed about job satisfaction, crew more frequently rated it 'above average' on foreign productions. Those that spent a greater part of their work on foreign productions were more likely to rate job satisfaction highly (Figure 14).

A higher rating of job satisfaction also tended to be associated with perceived learning benefits on foreign production. A third of the crew who rated job satisfaction 'above average' reported skill development as a benefit, compared with 13 per cent who rated the experience as 'average' or 'below average'.

Production designers in particular registered higher job satisfaction on foreign productions, with 81 per cent rating it 'above average'; this was in contrast to costume and wardrobe personnel, 37 per cent of whom rated it 'above average'.

Figure 14. Job satisfaction by relative level of foreign production work undertaken



Source: Australian Film Commission, survey of crew with foreign drama production experience, 2001

**Crew's views on the role of foreign production in the Australian industry**

At the end of the interview, the Australian crew were given an opportunity to make a final comment on the role of foreign productions in the Australian industry. These comments were classified under some broad headings and are presented in Table 12.

Table 12. General comments by crew on the role of foreign production in the Australian industry

	Number who commented	Proportion (%)
Essential for maintaining current level of employment in the industry/keep them coming	59	43%
More local content funding required to maintain balance/insufficient tax incentive for local productions/local content regulation necessary	26	19%
Complements the local industry/integral part of production industry	24	17%
Provides opportunities for trading skills	19	14%
Global industry so we need to be part of it	15	11%
Damaging the local industry/crew attracted to higher-paying foreign jobs	13	10%
Too many foreign heads of department brought in	11	8%
Opportunity for training new entrants/should support training schemes	7	5%
Important to achieve critical mass to maintain infrastructure	6	4%

Source: Australian Film Commission, survey of crew with foreign drama production experience, 2001

The foreign production sector's importance for **industry employment** was the main point emphasised by the industry practitioners. A large proportion (43 per cent) raised the importance of foreign production for employment.

*A lot of people want to work in the film industry but the industry is not big enough. US films have improved that situation.*

Director of photography

*I think it's good that they come here and if they bring good scripts and higher-profile cast/crew it can be only good for our industry. The more the merrier. But I wouldn't want to see us becoming a dumping ground for their productions.*

Picture editor

*I think they're very good for the industry (with some controls)... it's a world/global market now ... it's certainly employment for our local technicians – as long as we're not treated as Mexicans with mobiles.*

First assistant director

The second most frequently raised issue related to the **state of local production**. Foreign production was perceived to be essential for sustaining current employment levels in the industry because of a perceived decline in local production. Respondents observed that the relaxation of local content requirements for television commercials was just now being felt because of the downturn in the economic activity. Roughly one in five (19 per cent) called for more local content funding or further local content regulation to address a perceived imbalance developing between local and foreign production within the industry. While both foreign and local productions provide employment, some felt that the cultural role of the local industry was being eroded.

*It's really important that we find the balance between the two. Priority should be given to the Australian industry and secondly foreign. Culturally Australian [production] is more satisfying and necessary to maintain cultural integrity.*

Production manager

*I think [foreign productions] are very important but we must continue to produce local content as well. They're good as long as they don't smother the local industry. They bring interesting technical and creative challenges to local crew.*

Production manager

*The Australian film industry is abandoning itself. In order to survive we must work on the foreign productions. It feels like our government isn't supporting a particularly Australian industry – it feels like the government doesn't have an idea that the Australian film industry is a cultural voice.*

Director of photography

Some (17 per cent) perceived a strong **symbiotic relationship** between foreign production and local production. Foreign productions were seen to play a critical role through the injection of funds that support production infrastructure and provide reasonable income for production workers. Some felt that this economic support allows local production to be subsidised through cheaper pay rates and services costs.

*They pay well and [this] enables people to work on Australian films at a subsidised rate, particularly due to availability of equipment, which may have been acquired on one job and then used to advantage on others.*

Director of photography

*It allows us to keep up a good film and TV infrastructure, good equipment for grips and gaffers etc. Developing a number of specialist companies which is a terrific boon to Australian production. For labs and post facilities, it's giving them the opportunity to set up and learn.*

Production manager

Skills development on foreign productions was also a theme for some (14 per cent). Both the exposure to foreign crew's expertise and the opportunity to practise skills not afforded on local productions were seen as benefiting the local production sector.

*They're absolutely necessary. I love our industry but we're not the best and we need to work on foreign productions so Australians can learn their craft – no one here can properly teach the skills that we get from working on American productions. Then the Australian technicians can work on a par with the Americans. The entertainment world is an international industry*

First assistant director

*I've trained a lot of people on the equipment that I had to purchase [to work on] these foreign films – I could do this because of the dollars earned on foreign productions, and that investment has fed back into our industry.*

Sound recordist

The increasingly international nature of the film and television production industry was another common theme. Some perceived the local production industry in Australia as unsustainable in the context of what they saw as low demand for Australian film and television both locally and globally, and foreign production was therefore seen as essential if the industry is to survive.

*Foreign productions are financially beneficial but culturally detrimental. Global audiences determine who makes movies; the US are the international producers of stories and drama. The French make international romances. Australia doesn't make movies the world or Australians want to watch. So filmmaking will inevitably be about making US stories and drama.*

Production designer

*I don't believe the Australian market is large enough for our self-centred product. It doesn't sell overseas. If we want to get serious we need to look globally.*

Production manager

Around 10 per cent expressed concerns about the potential for foreign production to **damage the Australian industry**. Some commented on loss of creative control by Australians and the effect on local productions of a squeeze on quality crew.

*I think it is extremely important to keep Australian film producers abreast of how things are done elsewhere. But I'm very against all heads of department being foreign and bringing their own crew here, because then the Australian crews only get to have 'gopher' type roles. Solution: If a foreign director wants to bring his/her own heads of department, [he/she should] employ shadow Aussie heads of department, who can then get good Aussie crew on board.*

Director

While some crew hold reservations about the place of foreign production in the Australian industry, the overwhelming majority perceive benefits both personally and to the industry as a whole. Managing the balance between foreign and local production through an integrated policy approach to the Australian production industry appears essential to ensure a creatively vibrant and economically sustainable production industry.



## APPENDIX 1. RESEARCH METHODS

### Australian industry practitioners survey

Structured telephone interviews were conducted with 161 industry practitioners with experience of working on a foreign production in the last five years. The sample was drawn from *The Production Book 2001*, which lists industry practitioners by production role and principal state of residence. Those with a foreign drama credit in the last five years were targeted for interviewing. The focus of the study was drama productions although some participants who had only worked on foreign television commercials (TVC) were also interviewed. The interviews covered a range of department heads and crew positions as indicated in table A1. See appendix 3 for the questionnaire used as a basis for the survey.

Table A1. Sample profile by role

	Number interviewed
Director of photography	13
Camera operator	7
Camera assistant/focus puller	4
Clapper loader	1
Gaffer	7
Grip	5
Best boy/other electrics	1
Production designer/art director	16
Costume design/wardrobe	8
Make-up and hairdresser	15
Producer/line producer/co-producer	9
Production manager	12
Production coordinator/assistant	4
Sound recordist/engineer	9
Boom operator	3
Director	13
First assistant director	10
Picture editor	7
Sound editor	6
Special effects/pyrotechnics	4
Animation/CGI	7
Total	161

Most of the crew interviewed were listed in *The Production Book 2001* under one of the three eastern mainland states. The pool of industry practitioners in other states with a foreign production credit in the last five years was small.

Table A2: Sample profile by state

	Frequency	Percentage
NSW	83	52%
Victoria	33	21%
Queensland	36	22%
Western Australia	2	1%
South Australia	6	4%
Other State/Territory	1	1%
Total	161	100%

### Interviews with booking services

Booking services for freelance film and television production crew are a central conduit for employing production crew. They maintain professional diaries for freelance personnel and provide a point of contact for producers to access the vast majority of production personnel in Australia's film and television industry. The managers of these businesses therefore have a unique position in the industry for insight into the level of demand for film and television production personnel and the source of that demand.

Structured telephone interviews were conducted with eight managers of the following booking and answering services across Australia: The Booking Business (NSW); TBS – Technicians Booking Service (NSW); Calling All Crew (NSW); Top Technicians (NSW); Goldcoast Freelance (Qld); Queensland Film Crew (Qld); Freelance Promotions (Vic); South Australian Freelance (SA). The questions that formed the basis of the interview are attached at appendix 3.

### Interviews with LA producers

Eighteen LA-based producers who had been involved with productions filmed in Australia were interviewed. Of these, 13 had produced a telemovie in Australia and six had been involved in a feature film. Many had undertaken numerous productions in Australia. The questions that formed the basis of the interview are attached at appendix 3.

### In-depth interviews with key industry figures

Face to face interviews were conducted with some of the key figures in Australia's foreign production sector. These interviews included Kim Williams, then Chief Executive Fox Studios; Andrew Mason, Australian producer of *Matrix*, *Dark City* and *Red Planet*; Darryl Sheen of Coote/Hayes Productions and a producer at Warner Roadshow Studios in Queensland; Barbara Gibbs, production manager on numerous foreign productions; Lynn Gailey, of the Media, Entertainment and Arts Alliance (MEAA), Murray Pope of Animal Logic and line producer Carol Hughes.

### State film agency interviews

Interviews were conducted with representatives from the six state government organisations responsible for film and television industry policy and location promotion.

### Compilation of production and employment data

Data compiled by the AFC through the *National Survey of Feature Film and TV Drama Production* was analysed to assess trends in production spending.

The extent of experience on foreign productions among Australian production practitioners was assessed through analysis of reported production credits of industry practitioners listed in *The Production Book 2001*. Productions included feature films, TV series, telemovies, mini-series, animation and short films. The numbers with a foreign production credited were tallied and comparative statistics compiled.

The level of employment of Australian practitioners in crew positions or head of department roles on foreign productions was also assessed. The credits of 44 foreign productions in the last five years were examined and the nationality of the team member ascertained. Roles considered were art director/production designer, make-up, director, assistant director, director of photography, gaffer, producer, production manager, sound recordist and editor. Data provided by the Media, Entertainment and Arts Alliance (MEAA) on imported artists and technicians for foreign productions assisted in the identification process.

## APPENDIX 2. GOVERNMENT INCENTIVE SCHEMES

### States and territories

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In Australia, a number of states provide payroll tax rebate and other location-based incentive schemes.

In **NSW**, the Film & Television Industry Attraction Fund (FATIAF) is based on a rebate on payroll tax but also takes into consideration the amount spent in NSW, as well as other investments made, such as in new technology development. To be eligible there must be a minimum spend of A\$5 million in NSW or a post-production minimum spend of A\$3 million. The rebate is made available after production is completed in NSW and audited figures have been submitted. A payroll tax rebate scheme also operates at *Fox Studios, Sydney*.

*NSW Film and Television Office: <http://www.fto.nsw.gov.au>*

**Queensland** offers a payroll tax rebate (minimum Queensland spend of A\$3.5 million for a single project or A\$5 million for the bundling of two projects made within four years); a cast and crew salary rebate (equates to 8–10 per cent of weekly wage) for productions with a minimum Queensland spend of A\$100,000 that employ Queensland-based cast and crew; a 'traffic and fire services' rebate, and an internship scheme.

*Pacific Film and Television Commission (PFTC): <http://www.pftc.com.au>*

**Victoria** offers two incentive funds to encourage producers to locate film and television projects in the state, both administered through the Melbourne Film Office. Two million dollars a year is allocated for the Production Investment Attraction Fund for projects which will spend 70 per cent of their budget, or a minimum of A\$3.5 million, in Victoria, or use three or more post-production facilities in the state (post only). Through the Regional Victoria Film Location Assistance Fund \$500,000 per year is also available for projects shooting in regional Victoria; the fund will contribute to regional accommodation, regional living and relocation costs.

*Melbourne Film Office: <http://www.film.vic.gov.au/MFO/>*

**South Australia** offers a payroll tax exemption on qualifying feature films (worth approximately 6 per cent on crew wages). Only feature films are eligible and are required to demonstrate that the production will involve the employment of South Australian residents and result in economic benefits to South Australia. Exemptions are subject to approval by the Treasurer. The South Australian Film Corporation provides assistance to producers at all stage of application.

*South Australian Film Corporation: <http://www.safilm.com.au>*

**Western Australia** also offers a payroll tax incentive through the film agency ScreenWest. Payroll tax is only payable in Western Australia when the payroll exceeds a threshold of \$675,000. Beyond this, it is calculated on a sliding scale from 3.65 per cent to 6 per cent.

*ScreenWest: <http://www.screenwest.com.au>.*

The **Northern Territory** and **Tasmania** (Screen Tasmania <http://www.screen.tas.gov.au>) do not offer rebates or financial incentives.

Source: The 2002 *AusFILM Guide to Filming in Australia*, and state agencies.

### Federal schemes

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Under **Division 10B** of the *Income Tax Assessment Act 1936* (Cwlth) initial investors who acquire an interest in the copyright of new, qualifying productions receive a 100 per cent tax concession over two financial years once the film exists and is used to produce income. Projects must be assessed as wholly or substantially made in Australia and those that qualify are issued with a certificate. 10B applies to feature films, documentaries, mini-series, series, short dramas, multimedia formats such as CD-ROMs, plus promotional, variety, educational and training material as well as large-format programs.

Source: Commonwealth Department of Communications, Information Technology and the Arts, 'Film tax incentives: Fact sheet' ([http://www.dcita.gov.au/nsapi-graphics/?Mlval=dca\\_dispdoc&ID=3451](http://www.dcita.gov.au/nsapi-graphics/?Mlval=dca_dispdoc&ID=3451); accessed 22/4/02).

The **new tax incentive scheme introduced in 2001** is a refundable tax offset that will be applied at a fixed rate of 12.5 per cent to qualifying Australian expenditure on a film project. On completion of the film, the film's producer will apply for the offset through a tax return.

The key requirement for access to the incentive will be *minimum Australian expenditure of \$15 million*. The Government believes that this cut-off will be sufficient for offshore projects with 'high-end' production values to qualify for the incentive, and will also allow larger-budget Australian films to qualify. The payment will be restricted to feature films, mini-series and telemovies.

Further to this minimum requirement there will be two categories of eligibility:

- if the value of a film's Australian production spend is between \$15 million and \$50 million the producers will be required to spend a minimum of 70 per cent of total film production expenditure on film production activity in Australia to qualify for the offset;
- however, any production that spends \$50 million or more in Australia will qualify regardless of the percentage.

Source: '12.5% Refundable Tax Offset for Large Film Productions' ([http://www.dca.gov.au/nsapi-text/?Mlval=dca\\_dispdoc&pathid=%2ffilm%2dpackage%2frefundable%2ehtml](http://www.dca.gov.au/nsapi-text/?Mlval=dca_dispdoc&pathid=%2ffilm%2dpackage%2frefundable%2ehtml); accessed 22/04/02)

## APPENDIX 3. QUESTIONNAIRES

### Australian crew with foreign production experience

The AFC is undertaking research on the role of foreign production in providing employment for local film and television production crews. The findings will be published as a report. By foreign productions, we mean film, television productions and television commercials where a foreign production company is the main producer and the creative control is foreign. Some examples are *Mission Impossible*, *Matrix* and *Noah's Ark*, *South Pacific*, *Baywatch*. We have some particular questions and then if you have any further comments we would welcome them.

1. What foreign productions have you worked on in the last five years?

No. of feature films	<input type="text"/>
No. of television dramas (includes telemovies, mini series, series and serials)	<input type="text"/>
No. of television commercials	<input type="text"/>
Other	<input type="text"/>

2. Approximately what proportion of your work has been for a foreign production (versus local) over the last five years?

3. On foreign productions how often was your Head of Department non-Australian?  
OR [If respondent is a HOD] How often were other HODs non-Australian?

<input type="checkbox"/> 1. Never	<input type="checkbox"/> 2. Sometimes	<input type="checkbox"/> 3. About 50:50	<input type="checkbox"/> 4. Usually	<input type="checkbox"/> 5. Always
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4. Are there differences in the production practices on a foreign production?

<input type="checkbox"/> 1. Yes	<input type="checkbox"/> 2. No
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If yes, what are the key differences?

6. In your opinion, what are the benefits of working on foreign productions?

7. In particular, did you find you learnt new skills or work practices?

<input type="checkbox"/> 1. Yes	<input type="checkbox"/> 2. No
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8. If yes, what were the new skills/production practices?

9. What, if anything, do you think the foreign crew learnt from the Australian crew?

10. Did you find any difficulties or aspects you didn't like in working on a foreign production?

<input type="checkbox"/> 1. Yes	<input type="checkbox"/> 2. No
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11. If yes, what were the difficulties/problems?

12. Thinking about your experiences on foreign productions, as a whole, how would you rate foreign productions (versus local) in terms of job satisfaction?

Similarly, how would you rate the professional development, opportunity to make new contacts and the financial rewards?

	High (above average)	Average/ normal	Low (below average)
Job satisfaction	1 <input type="checkbox"/>	2 <input type="checkbox"/>	3 <input type="checkbox"/>
Learning/professional development	1 <input type="checkbox"/>	2 <input type="checkbox"/>	3 <input type="checkbox"/>
New contacts	1 <input type="checkbox"/>	2 <input type="checkbox"/>	3 <input type="checkbox"/>
Financially rewarding	1 <input type="checkbox"/>	2 <input type="checkbox"/>	3 <input type="checkbox"/>

13. If more financially rewarding approximately how much higher proportionally e.g. 25%, double?

14. Thinking now about your production work in general, if you had a choice between two jobs shooting at the same time, how would the following factors influence your decision of which job to take?

	Some Influence	Little/no influence
1. Pay rate (difference of 10-20%)	1 <input type="checkbox"/>	2 <input type="checkbox"/>
2. Level of creative control	1 <input type="checkbox"/>	2 <input type="checkbox"/>
3. Team on the project	1 <input type="checkbox"/>	2 <input type="checkbox"/>
4. Script	1 <input type="checkbox"/>	2 <input type="checkbox"/>
5. Location of job	1 <input type="checkbox"/>	2 <input type="checkbox"/>
6. Being an Australian production	1 <input type="checkbox"/>	2 <input type="checkbox"/>
7. Opportunity to develop new skills	1 <input type="checkbox"/>	2 <input type="checkbox"/>

15. a) What would be the most important of these factors?

b) What would be the second most important of these factors?

16. Do you have a personal preference for local or foreign production work?

1. Local  2. Foreign  3. No Preference

17. If some preference, why do you prefer foreign/local productions to work on?

18. What do you think attracts foreign productions to Australia?

<input type="checkbox"/> 1. Skilled local crew	<input type="checkbox"/> 6. Incentives e.g. rebates/tax incentives
<input type="checkbox"/> 2. Exchange rate/weak dollar	<input type="checkbox"/> 7. English language
<input type="checkbox"/> 3. Production & post-production infrastructure (incl. studios)	<input type="checkbox"/> 8. Cheaper costs
<input type="checkbox"/> 4. landscape/diverse locations	<input type="checkbox"/> 9. Other (specify)
<input type="checkbox"/> 5. Reverse seasons/ climate	

19. a) Which of the factors mentioned do you think is most important?

b) Which of the factors mentioned is the next most important?

20. What factors might deter/prevent foreign productions coming to Australia?

21. Are there any final comments you would like to make about the role of foreign productions in Australia's film and television production industry?

**EXTRA QUESTIONS FOR AUSTRALIAN PRODUCERS & PRODUCTION MANAGERS**

**21.** Thinking specifically about the last foreign production you were involved with, what do think was the main reason the foreign company made a large proportion of the production in Australia in that instance?

**22.** Do you think the recent changes announced by the Government, giving increased tax incentives for films with budgets in excess of \$15 million will lure more big budget films to Australia? Why to you think that?

**23.** When particular personnel are not available are there others available to meet the skill needs?

1. Yes  2. No

---

If no, which particular crew positions are hard to fill?

**24.** Do foreign productions take priority for local crew and cast?

1. Yes  2. No

---

If yes, why?

**25.** Do you think foreign production activity is presenting opportunities for less experienced crew and new industry entrants?

**US producers who had shot in Australia**

I am undertaking research for an Australian Film Commission, on US film producers experience shooting television drama and features in Australia.

1. I see you were involved with (list of known projects shot in Australia). Have you been involved in any other projects in Australia?

2. Thinking specifically about the last production you did in Australia, what were the main reasons you took the project to Australia?

*(if they say the deal - query what aspects of the deal e.g. tax incentives, exchange rate, lower costs)*

- |   |  |
|---|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> 1. Skilled local crew  | <input type="checkbox"/> 5. Reverse seasons/ climate                           |
| <input type="checkbox"/> 2. Exchange rate/weak dollar                                   | <input type="checkbox"/> 6. Incentives e.g. rebates/tax incentives             |
| <input type="checkbox"/> 3. Production & post-production infrastructure (incl. studios) | <input type="checkbox"/> 7. English language                                   |
| <input type="checkbox"/> 4. landscape/diverse locations                                 | <input type="checkbox"/> 8. Cheaper costs (dollar or real difference in costs) |
|   | <input type="checkbox"/> 9. Other (specify)                                    |

*(If they mention more than one aspect)*

3. a) Which of the factors mentioned do you think was most important? *(code from above)*  
 b) Which of the factors mentioned was the next most important? *(code from above)*

4. How did you come to consider Australia as a possible location? For example, did someone approach you, does you company have established relationships with Australian interest, or marketing by Australian government at trade shows?

5. What would you say were the greatest benefits of doing production in Australia?

Possible answers

- |   |  |
|---|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> 1. Professionalism of local crew                               | <input type="checkbox"/> 5. Reverse seasons/climate                |
| <input type="checkbox"/> 2. Exchange rate/weak dollar                                   | <input type="checkbox"/> 6. Incentives e.g. rebates/tax incentives |
| <input type="checkbox"/> 3. Production & post-production infrastructure (incl. studios) | <input type="checkbox"/> 7. English language                       |
| <input type="checkbox"/> 4. landscape/diverse locations                                 | <input type="checkbox"/> 8. Cheaper costs                          |
|   | <input type="checkbox"/> 9. positive friendly attitude of crew     |

6. What if any, aspects of working in Australia present difficulties?

Possible answers:

- |   |
|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Dealing/accessibility with Australian tax office |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Complexity of tax incentives                     |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Union conditions for crew                        |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Attitude of crew                                 |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Distance from home                               |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Dealing with local councils                      |

7. What proportion of the crew working on (last project shoot in Australia) were Australians?

8. Which, if any, heads of department did you take to Australia?

**9.** How would you compare Australian crew compared with US crew?

*(in terms of production skills)*

**10.** What, if anything, did you learn from the people you worked with in Australia?

**11.** What, if anything, do you think the Australian crew and associates learnt from you and the Head of Departments you worked with you?

**13.** Were there any difficulties in finding people with the skills you needed for the production in Australia? If yes, what in particular

**14.** How important are financial incentives offered by foreign governments in choosing off-shore locations for your productions?

**15.** Have you heard of the new tax incentive scheme recently announced by the Australian Government?

**16.** Under the scheme announced, production spending of between \$15 million and \$50 million in Australia will be eligible for a refundable 12.5% tax offset.

Would such a scheme increase the likelihood of you taking future to Australia?

**17.** What would deter you from taking future productions to Australia?

**18.** Have you done production work in other off-shore locations e.g. Canada? If yes, where?

**19.** If yes, considering both Australia and other locations you have worked off-shore, what would be your preference for future off-shore productions and why?

**20.** Are there any final comments you would like to make about production work in Australia?

### **Booking services**

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Thank you for finding the time to speak to me today. I am undertaking research for the AFC on role of foreign production in providing local employment and professional development for film and television production crew. By foreign productions I mean film and television productions with a foreign production company as the main producer. Some examples are Mission Impossible, Matrix and Flipper, Baywatch.

1. Can you provide an estimate of the proportion of the bookings you make annually that would be for foreign productions?

2. Is it similar for all types of production? e.g. film, TVC, television?

Yes  No

---

*If no,*

What proportion of film bookings are for foreign productions?

What proportion of TVCs ?

What proportion of television production ?

---

3. Who would normally contact your company?

Foreign producer,

local producer,

production manager

---

4. Which crew roles are in most demand from foreign production companies?

5. Do they request specific personnel or to they make more general crew availability requests?

6. Are there particular skills or experience they seem to be looking for?

7. Do they prefer to work with personnel that have previously worked on a foreign production?

Yes  No

---

*If yes, what reasons do they give for this preference?*

8. Does experience on foreign productions improve your clients' work prospects?

9. It is sometimes said an important outcome from increased foreign production is the skill transfer to local crew members from working with international crews. From feedback from your clients is that an outcome you are aware of ?

10. What is your impression of the impact of increased foreign production on crew availability?

11. When particular personnel are not available are there others available to meet the skill needs for other productions?

---

Yes  No

---

*If no, which particular crew positions are hard to fill?*

12. Do foreign productions take priority for local crew and cast?

---

Yes  No

---

*If yes, why?*

13. Do you think foreign production activity is presenting opportunities for less experienced crew and new industry entrants?

14. Have your clients expressed a preference for foreign or local production work?

*If foreign, What do they say is the reason for their preference for foreign?*

*If local, Why do some prefer local productions*

15. Are you aware of difference in pay rates for foreign vs local productions?

---

Yes  No

---

*If yes, why are there different pay levels*

16. What do you think attracts foreign productions to Australia?

<input type="checkbox"/> 1. Skilled local crew	<input type="checkbox"/> 5. Reverse seasons/climate
<input type="checkbox"/> 2. Exchange rate/weak dollar	<input type="checkbox"/> 6. Incentives e.g. rebates/tax incentives
<input type="checkbox"/> 3. Production & post-production infrastructure (incl. studios)	<input type="checkbox"/> 7. English language
<input type="checkbox"/> 4. landscape/diverse locations	<input type="checkbox"/> 8. Cheaper costs
	<input type="checkbox"/> 9. Other (specify)

---

17. a) Which of the factors mentioned do you think is most important?

b) Which of the factors mentioned is the next most important?

18. What factors might deter/prevent foreign productions coming to Australia?

Are there any final comments you would like to make about the role of foreign productions in Australia's film and television production industry.



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