

FOREIGN FILM AND TELEVISION DRAMA PRODUCTION IN

AUSTRALIA

REPORT LAUNCH

WEDNESDAY 17 JULY 2002

11 am FUNCTION ROOM, LEVEL 1, FRANK HURLEY STAND, FOX
STUDIOS

Good morning everyone. I am Maureen Barron, Chair of the Australian Film Commission, and it is my pleasure to welcome you here today for the launch of the latest AFC research report - **Foreign Film and Television Drama Production in Australia.**

The Australian Film Commission's core business is the development of the Australian film and television production industry. And, through its Policy, Research and Information Branch, the Commission is at the forefront of industry analysis.

Well over 2 years ago, in response to growing interest throughout the Australian film and television production industry in foreign production, the Commission decided to investigate the consequences for the Australian industry resulting from foreign production in Australia.

Through its tracking of production levels in Australia, the Commission had identified the growth in offshore production and that it was being sustained at a level where it had become a significant part of the local landscape.

Some figures illustrate the undeniable impact on the local sector of foreign production - Foreign drama shot in Australia in 2000/01 spent \$191 million here, accounting for almost a third (31%) of that year's drama production spending – clearly making it a vital component of the domestic scene, and demonstrating Australia's competitiveness with other international locations in attracting production.

It struck us that much of the debate about the impact of the largely US runaway production consisted of anecdote and hearsay. In formulating the research the AFC has been keen to establish facts to support or dispel the myths and to understand what offshore production means for our local industry.

Foreign production occurs in Australia as a result of the investment by Government over more than 25 years in the local production sector. While the growth of offshore production has clear implications for the local industry at many levels, the balanced growth of the entire industry

is an appropriate national goal. The crucial balance between domestic and offshore production can only be achieved by an understanding of those components and how each can contribute to the development of the Australian industry.

Research had been done about the undeniable economic benefits to Australia of foreign production. The focus of this AFC report is local employment, which we found to be a topic of much speculation but little research. So we decided to go direct to the source and we spoke to 160 Australians who have worked on foreign productions to elicit their experiences and insights.

The key objectives of the AFC report were:

1. to examine the reasons that foreign productions come to Australia, and identify key determinants and priorities;
2. to investigate perceptions of crew capacity and depth around Australia;
3. to explore the experience of Australian crewmembers working on foreign productions and, in particular, the role of foreign production in professional development of crewmembers.

A key theme highlighted by crew members' experience was the extent to which skill transfer was a 'two-way street'. Australians are able to expand on their craft, especially due to larger budgets and more equipment available through foreign productions; while foreign crewmembers learn from our egalitarian and efficient work practices.

Interviews were also conducted in Los Angeles with a sample of producers who had recently filmed in Australia, and they offered a vivid testimony of why Americans are attracted to Australia as a production destination. While financial factors will always be a central element in studio decisions on where to film, it was stressed that our crews play a pivotal role in building the kind of relationships that keep overseas producers coming back to Australia.

Here is a just a sample comment from an LA producer:

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.

The report illustrates that the Australian production industry is increasingly interconnected with foreign production; that domestic and foreign film and television production should be seen as a holistic entity, underscoring the internationalisation of our audio-visual industry.

It also cautions us not to lose sight of the fact that our crews have learnt and honed their skills on largely low budget Australian productions. Professional development and training opportunities for Australian crews to make Australian films and television programs will also foster and encourage further foreign production. Foreign productions do not take risks on untried key crew. The valued roles go to those who have made a reputation on high profile Australian productions.

With careful management Australia can continue to reap the economic benefits without jeopardising the cultural benefits Australians derive from the Australian industry.

A healthy mix of various kinds of production activity is part of this management. The report illuminates the complex, sometimes competing, but ultimately synergistic and mutually beneficial relationship between domestic film and television production and international projects attracted from offshore.

Today we have invited two speakers who are well qualified to offer perspectives on foreign production in Australia.

First is Andrew Mason – one of Australia’s best known and busiest producers with credits including DARK CITY, THE MATRIX and its twin sequels currently shooting in Sydney, RED PLANET, and the feature films DANNY that has just completed principal photography and SWIMMING UPSTREAM currently in post production.

Please welcome Andrew

ANDREW SPEAKS

I’d now like to welcome Dominic Case who is the Group Technology & Services Manager for Atlab Australia, chair of the Film Industry Broadband Resources Enterprise (FIBRE) and an international governor of the Society of Motion Picture and Television Engineers.

DOMINIC SPEAKS

Thank you Dominic

I would like to thank all those who contributed to the report – the interviewees who gave generously of their time, our consultant, Kate Aisbett, our editor Cathy Gray, and industry organisations including AUSfilm.

The report launched today can be downloaded from the AFC website; there are some hard copies here and they can be ordered from AFC Publications.

Thank you again for attending today – we encourage you to read the report and discuss its findings.