

Address to the AFC Parliamentary
Reception

Canberra ACT

20 March 2002

Speech delivered by
Maureen Barron

Address to the AFC Parliamentary Reception

Wednesday 20 March 2002

Minister Alston, Minister Kemp, Ministers, Senators, Members and distinguished guests. Thank you for coming this evening and for your interest in the work of the Australian Film Commission.

I'm Maureen Barron, Chair of the Australian Film Commission. I want to start by very briefly introducing our Commissioners and our Chief Executive.

- Louise Staley, our Deputy Chair, is a Melbourne-based financial and communications expert.
- Rolf de Heer, one of Australia's leading filmmakers, internationally known for films such as *Bad Boy Bubby*, *Dance Me To My Song* and the soon to be released *The Tracker*.
- Helen Leake, film producer whose credits include *Heaven's Burning* starring Russell Crowe and the soon to be released *Black and White* starring Robert Carlyle, Charles Dance, Kerry Fox and Colin Fries
- Kris Noble, Director of Drama at the Nine Network.
- Bruce Moir, independent documentary filmmaker and media consultant.
- Tony Zeccola, Managing Director of Palace Films, one of Australia's leading distributors and exhibitors.
- And our Chief Executive, Kim Dalton, who has had a distinguished career as a television producer.

Unfortunately, one of our Commissioners can't be with us tonight – John Polson, filmmaker, creator of *Tropfest* but perhaps best known to you from his film roles in *The Boys* and *Mission Impossible 2*.

However, I am very pleased to be able to introduce to you our very special guests who represent the outstanding achievements of our industry:

- Claudia Karvan, AFI Award winner and currently delighting television audiences every week as Alex in the hit series *The Secret Life of Us*, produced by Southern Star for Channel 10 in Australia and Channel 4 in the UK. Claudia's long career in the Australian film industry began with her role, alongside Judy Davis, in Gillian Armstrong's *High Tide*. She has starred in, amongst others, *The Big Steal*, *the Heartbreak Kid* and the new *Star Wars*, shot last year at Fox Studios in Sydney;

- . Rachael Blake, AFI Award and Silver Logie winner, who starred in the acclaimed ABC television drama series *Wildside*. Last year she won an AFI Award for Best Actress in a Supporting Role for *Lantana*, which has achieved tremendous critical and audience success; and
- . Tony Martin, also a Silver Logie winner. Tony starred in the AFI Award winning feature film *The Interview*, and who will ever forget his mesmerising performance as Neddy Smith in the stunning television mini-series *Blue Murder*. Tony also featured, with Rachael, in *Wildside* and you also remember him from the series *Heartbreak High*.

Australia is no longer an old economy. It can no longer be described in a meaningful way using metaphors involving sheep and wide-open spaces.

Our successes across a wide range of achievements – artistically, economically, in the sporting arena - are testimony to the fact that we not only work hard, we work smart, and our film and television industry is the perfect example.

Here we have a tertiary, high tech, clean industry which is truly global and in which Australians participate in every sphere, achieving the highest levels and accolades. This year's record 12 Oscar nominations for Australian films and filmmakers being one example. No other country outside the US achieves this kind of result.

2001/02 was another great year locally and internationally for Australian film and Australian filmmakers.

Foreign production levels in Australia also increased which assists Australian employment and infrastructure development.

However, success and growth is underpinned by the continuing support of government.

The industry is grateful for the affirmation of this continuing support by Government, which was most recently demonstrated in the funding package of nearly \$93 million for the industry announced late last year. We see this as reflecting the Government's understanding and view of the industry as a whole - that it encompasses both domestic and foreign production.

It is an industry integrated across sectors with both economic and cultural outcomes. Both of these are worthy of continuing support. It is important that Government continues to monitor and respond to the changing nature of our industry and the AFC is proud of its role in assisting Government to do this by the provision of on-going and accurate data and analysis.

In light of this, the current review by the Australian Broadcasting Authority of the Australian Content Standard for Commercial Television is a central concern.

The Standard plays a crucial role in supporting our production sector and delivering cultural outcomes to Australian audiences. It is important that it continues to operate effectively and in a manner which responds to the changing nature of the broadcasting market.

It is also critical that Government and industry continue to monitor the funding available for medium budget Australian films. Contraction in this area of the industry will inhibit Australia's ability to contribute to Australian culture and to its standing on the international stage.

The successes of this industry are shared and enjoyed by all Australians – at the box office, on their television screens at home, and in the applause on Oscar night. At the AFC we are deeply excited by all this.

It is a great privilege to be at the centre of this industry and play such an important role in laying its foundations into the future. We are also proud to have earned the trust of the Government in supporting our capacity to sustain and increase that contribution (through our additional funding over the next two years).

Tonight it is our pleasure to provide an opportunity for all of you to meet and talk with the AFC Commissioners, Chief Executive and senior management, as well as several of our leading actors, and become more familiar with the work of the AFC and the Australian film and television industry more generally. It is therefore with a great deal of pleasure that I welcome you here tonight.

Maureen Barron 20 March 2002