

AFC RECEPTION PARLIAMENT HOUSE CANBERRA – 18 MARCH 2003

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.

- **Paul Hamra**, our Deputy Chair, communications consultant whose company operates in Adelaide and Sydney.
- **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 recently released *The Tracker* and *Alexandra's Project*.
- **Helen Leake**, film producer whose credits include *Heaven's Burning* starring Russell Crowe and the recently released *Black and White* starring Robert Carlyle, Charles Dance, Kerry Fox and Colin Friels.
- **Bruce Moir**, independent documentary filmmaker and media consultant.
- **Tony Zeccola**, Managing Director of Palace Films, one of Australia's leading distributors and exhibitors.
- **Tom Kennedy**, Managing Director of Beyond On Line and Brainwaave, and Chair of the Internet Industry Association.
- **Kris Noble**, previously Head of Drama at the Nine Network, and presently producing and directing a new program for the Seven Network in Melbourne – and for that reason cannot be with us this evening.
- And our Chief Executive, **Kim Dalton**, who has had a distinguished

I am also very pleased to be able to introduce to you some very special guests who can usually be found taking risks out in front of the camera and who are the public face of our industry:

Rebecca Gibney, best known as Jane Halifax forensic profiler, Rebecca has a long list of achievements that includes roles in *Come in Spinner*, *Snowy*, *The Silver Brumby* and *Kangaroo Palace*. Rebecca is a Logie and AFI Award recipient.

Rachel Ward, well-known to us from her early performance in *The Thorn Birds* and the more recent *On The Beach*, Rachel has also become a skilled and respected filmmaker whose credits include the award-winning and AFC funded short film *The Big House* and the just-completed AFC-funded short feature *Martha's New Coat*.

Marcus Graham, amongst many film and television roles which recently include *Horseplay*, *Mulholland Drive* and *Good Guys Bad Guys*, and is currently starring in the smash hit season of the stage play *The Blue Room* with Sigrid Thornton.

Garry Sweet, one of our most recognisable screen personalities and winner of Logie and AFI Awards. Gary is perhaps best known for his role in *Police Rescue* and has most recently been seen in the television series *Stingers* as well as in Rolf de Heer's locally and internationally acclaimed features *The Tracker* and recently-released *Alexandra's Project*.

And **Matthew Newton**. Mathew represents Australia's emerging talent. A NIDA graduate, he has already established himself with his roles in the feature film *Looking For Alibrandi* and the television series *Changi*.

The Australian Film Commission is the Federal Government's development agency for the film, television and interactive media industry. It develops projects, people and the industry itself.

Australian films and Australian television programs project an Australian identity to the world. Australian film and television has played a central role over the past thirty years in establishing an international profile for our country and our culture. It is an industry of national importance and has been one of the great ambassadors for this country around the world.

2002 was another great year locally and internationally for Australian film and Australian filmmakers. However, that success and growth is underpinned by the continuing support of our government.

For a country our size, the profile of the Australian industry and the depth of talent that it produces is quite disproportionate to the population and the size of the industry. Australia certainly boxes above its weight. But in the absence of regulation and subsidy, Australia's industry, its ability to continue to produce and disseminate Australian film and television and the ability of Australian audiences to have access to minimum levels of Australian content, would be severely affected.

Therefore, I would like to take this opportunity to highlight three primary concerns for our industry and the AFC.

Funding is, of course, always an issue. The increased allocation this and next financial years was welcomed by the AFC and by the industry. However, it is 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. This is one of the reasons why the industry eagerly awaits the Government's response

Secondly, the current round of WTO negotiations and bi-lateral trade negotiations, such as those about to commence here in Canberra with the US, remind us again how Government support for Australia's audiovisual industries through regulation and funding help deliver cultural policy outcomes that are supported by the community.

In this light, I would like to wholeheartedly applaud the Government's repeated commitment to preserving its ability to regulate its own cultural and social issues. Australia's regulatory and funding measures deliver on the government's cultural policy objectives for the film and television industries, and are transparent, modest, targeted, and do not exclude foreign material. Australia still remains open to international trade, as demonstrated by the local audiovisual industry's acknowledged place in the global economy and the amount of non-Australian, especially US, material already on our screens.

The third area of vital interest is the current review by the Australian Broadcasting Authority of the Australian Content Expenditure requirement for Subscription Television. As the Australian subscription television audience continues to grow, it is vital that pay TV joins other broadcasters in screening quality Australian drama and documentary programs. The AFC has asked the ABA to increase local content requirements for pay TV drama and introduce regulation to documentary channels. Such an increase would help to ensure that the Government's cultural policy objectives are reflected across the broadcasting sectors.

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. It is a great privilege for the AFC 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, through additional funding, to support our capacity to sustain and increase

Tonight it is our pleasure to provide an opportunity for all of you to meet and talk with the AFC as well as a number of our leading actors, and become 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
Chair, Australian Film Commission
18 March 2003