

SPARK

Program launch on Wednesday 14 August 2002

at

AFC Boardroom
2nd flr, 120 Clarendon St
South Melbourne

Welcome everyone to the launch of the SPARK script workshop program. I am Maureen Barron, Chair of the Australian Film Commission

This program supports the art and craft of great storytelling for the screen. It's wonderful to see so many writers, producers and directors here today.

SPARK is a co-venture between the AFC and the AFTRS. I particularly want to thank our partners at the AFTRS. Their enthusiasm and support for this program is greatly appreciated.

The program will be the culmination of a great deal of planning and effort.

The idea for a national script workshop has been on the agenda for some time at the AFC. This year, with some much-

appreciated additional government funding, the AFC has been able to implement this plan.

Certainly, we have been inspired by overseas models of script workshops such as Equinoxe, Arista and PAL, which do very interesting work in this area. The AFC has supported a number of Australian writers to attend Equinoxe. They have returned invigorated and enriched by the process, with a greater sense of creative confidence. We feel it's also important to build on the skills, talent and expertise within Australia.

The AFC has intermittently organised script workshops since the 1980s. From one particular workshop in the late 1980s, came films such as *Proof*, *Muriel's Wedding*, *Return Home* and *Death in Brunswick*.

SPARK is a comprehensive four-stage development program for feature projects. The first stage is the weeklong residential workshop to be held at Hepburn Springs in February next year. The second stage is writing the next draft with funding from the AFC. Then there will be more feedback on the creative direction of the project, and the development of a strategic financing plan with input from sales agents and distributors.

The focus of the workshop is very much on supporting, challenging and inspiring the writer. It is the writer who starts with the blank page and who gives shape to his or her stories and ideas. But film is a collaborative process – it is crucial that the director and the producer are also involved, that they can share and build on the same vision.

The structure of the workshop is eight advisors and eight writers meeting in one to one sessions over a week. For a couple of days they will be joined by the other members of the creative team – the directors and producers.

The principle of the workshop is respect for the creative process and for everyone involved in this murky, complex and rewarding process. Our ethos is *viva diversity* – there is no ‘correct’ way to tell a story. The different advisors will bring a diversity of insights, methodologies and perspectives to each script. Their role is to advise, challenge, share, nurture, respond and suggest. It is the writers who determine which ideas resonate with them and the stories they wish to tell.

An important part of this process is the openness and generosity of all the participants to each other. To achieve the most from it, you need to be open to the viewpoints available.

The AFC is committed to addressing the problems in the feature development process identified in the AFC benchmark paper on Development published in 2000. These were the chronic under-resourcing of development, and the fragmented and protracted nature of the development process. To that I would add the isolation and lack of support for writers developing feature scripts.

The SPARK program is one intervention to address this situation. We hope the experience will be enormously exciting, enjoyable and productive for all those involved.