

NSW Filmmakers Rally 22/10/06
Speech – Margaret Pomeranz

I want to thank the New South Wales Filmmakers Group for inviting me to speak today. Word must have gotten out that I'm passionate about Australian films.

An incident happened earlier this year that really disturbed me. It was the loss of the If Awards to Queensland. I was so upset about this event that I wrote to the Premier and I want to quote from part of that letter today.....

“For some time now, and increasingly under your predecessor, I have been concerned about the lack of initiative this state displays towards the arts, particularly towards film culture in this state.

The recent loss of the If Awards to Queensland is just the final straw in what has been a catastrophic series of downgradings in New South Wales.

The Victorian Government has consistently supported film culture, and with the establishment of the Australian Centre for the Moving Image, can rightly claim to be the centre for appreciation of film culture in Australia. I believe Queensland is establishing a cinemateque, something that was long-considered in New South Wales as an extension of the MCA, but which eventually came to nothing.

The South Australian Government is dynamic in its investment in film culture, establishing a Film Festival which is an enormous success, particularly with the Government's sponsoring of SA films that have proven to be a highlight of the Festival.

Queensland's Film Festival, also one of the more recently established ones, is in full swing under a Government that is enthusiastic about supporting not only film culture but film business in that state.

The AFI Awards are now full-time in Victoria, at one time it was three years in Victoria, three years in NSW.

The only event left in NSW were the If Awards which have grown in stature in recent years, particularly since they began to be broadcast on SBS Television, an event with which I was originally involved.

And now Mr. Beattie, seizing a golden opportunity, has offered the If people significant financial inducement to go to Queensland. They will now be the end event of the Screen Producers' Association of Australia conference which was also at one time a New South Wales event, now relocated to the Gold Coast.

It seems to me that New South Wales is becoming an event-free state. There appears to be an attitude that all we have to do here is rest on the laurels of our harbour and tourism. But what about the people who live here? Tourism may provide jobs for people but it doesn't feed our souls. Fireworks are just not enough. The Olympics gave Sydney a wonderful energy, there was terrific enthusiasm for our ability to stage a truly great event, but it seems that energy has just drained away, like a hot-air balloon that is now lying sadly flat on the ground.

Other states are aggressively seeking and winning opportunities in the Arts that New South Wales ought to be fighting to keep.”

I received a reply from the Premier saying he took the issues I raised seriously and would be referring it to the relevant minister. I received a reply from the Minister from the Arts Minister Bob Debus that was totally non-inspiring.

I am happy to see Australian films from whichever state they happen to originate.... I was blown away by Look Both Ways last year, a Melbourne film, shot in South Australia..... Totally loved Kenny – a Melbourne production, and also really loved two from New South Wales – Candy and Suburban Mayhem..... I don't want to be parochial about this, but what I do think is fair is a level playing field..... And I'm really concerned about this State Government's commitment towards the arts..... and towards film culture and film business in NSW.....

I just want to quote some figures that speak for themselves.....

The government allocation to the FTO is currently \$9m. Film Victoria's is approximately \$17.9m. (This followed an increase of \$8m spread over two years announced in their last state budget). The PFTC's allocation is \$9.6m and Screen West's is \$8m.

The FTO has no money for digital media. Victoria has \$3.4m.

NSW has much less on offer in the way of incentives for footloose production.

The NSW Film Industry Attraction Fund provides payroll tax rebates at 30% of payroll tax (which is 6%) so the incentive is valued at 1.8% of payroll.

Victoria provides a discretionary cash incentive through its Production Investment Attraction Fund. They are able to offer projects at least double what NSW is able to offer.

Queensland offers a full rebate of their 4.75% payroll tax plus 12.% rebate on cast and crew salaries, a head of department incentive, and a post production incentive of up to 10% of Queensland spend.

South Australia offers a full upfront exemption on its 5.5% payroll tax, and a 10% rebate on SA cast and crew costs.

It's scary.

I've been around the Australian film industry for a long time. I actually think the Australian film industry is responsible for me being where I am now. The first film that David Stratton and I ever argued about was *The Empty Beach*!

NSW had a vibrant, exciting film industry, we were the leading state for film production. Not any more. We're bleeding from the gills. What does the Government think? That an infrastructure that's been built up over so many years, with so many skills developed by so many people is just going to hang around? No it's not. It's not only going to head to Hollywood if at all possible, it's going to head north, south and west where it's cheaper to live anyway.

My son over the last eighteen months has worked in New Zealand, Canada and now he's in England because there is no work here for him.

I've seen so many exciting initiatives just drifting from this state. That lost opportunity of a cinemateque at the Museum of Contemporary Art pains me still. The Sydney Film Festival, struggling to become a

featured event on this city's calendar with let's call it, lacklustre funding from our State Government. The loss of SPAA, the AFI's, the IF's. I could just spit. I'm so angry. At the meeting to close the Chauvel I said I thought Bob Carr was the worst Arts Minister I'd experienced in this state. And everybody gasped. But truly it's not enough to hand over the Showground to Fox. There has to be a commitment to Australian film production, NSW film production. The last Arts Minister of any passion was Peter Collins. He had that passion and you need passion in your Arts Minister. I must say it helps if he's also the Treasurer. Or the Premier. So I call on our Premier Iemma to either get with the passion or appoint somehow who has it. We desperately need someone in Parliament to fight for culture in this state. And to commit decent funds.

I want to live in a State where public transport runs safely to time, where there is reliable hospital care for everyone and where kids can get an excellent education no matter how rich their parents are. But I also want to live in a vibrant exciting city that's culturally rich, that's dynamic in its attitude towards the arts and especially towards film.

I used to live in a State like that. I don't any more.