

**Speech to the NSW Filmmakers Group Rally  
Fox Studios – Hall of Industries  
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I am here today as the Executive Director of the Australian Screen Directors Association to say that directors stand with the NSW filmmakers' campaign to revive the NSW industry, just as we stand behind similar campaigns in other states.

### **1. National problem**

I would just like to start by noting that the problem that NSW is currently facing is in many ways a national problem. ASDA is a national organisation representing the interest of 600 filmmakers across the country – it understands the national dimensions of this crisis intimately.

- Production levels are down across the country and have been trending downward for at least the past 5 years.
- Private investment in the industry is at critically low levels
- The crisis is not genre-specific and has affected all forms of production, including feature films, documentaries, TV dramas and TVCs, not to mention all film practitioners – directors, writers, producers, editors, actors, DOPs, technicians, post houses

This is why ASDA has been working so hard with other industry organizations to develop a new body to present a united front to Government on behalf of the whole industry – the Australian Screen Council.

And this is why ASDA and the Screen Council have been working so hard responding to the current federal film funding review and have been lobbying so hard in Canberra:

- so that we can increase the size of the funding pie available to the industry, and
- so that we can develop a new funding model to attract more finance to the sector

It is still early days, and the review is still some way off from a resolution, however there is a better than even chance of a good outcome. We will be working assiduously over the next few months, and lobbying Government, to fight for the best result that we can.

The important thing is that this review, and the creation of the Australian Screen Council, has united the industry in an unprecedented way. The formation of the NSW filmmakers group, and similar bodies around Australia, indicate that other sections of the industry have recognised the need for unity of action – and we applaud them on their initiative.

## **2. Developing the local industry the priority**

The NSW problem in recent years has been more keenly felt than other states. Why is this so?

The reason is that the steady decline of the local sector in this state, which has been in line with the rest of the country, has been masked by the presence of a number of big budget international films.

There is no doubt that it is a great thing overall for an industry to be able to attract international film productions, and certainly all of our Governments should be working to have in place the most competitive mechanisms to encourage them to come. However, the fact remains that an industry built solely around the prospect of offshore production – and where Government support is overwhelmingly devoted to attracting this production – is one that is built on sand.

As we have found to our cost in recent times, the offshore industry is a mercenary one that flies with the winds of the currency.

What is required in the first instance is a viable critical mass of local production. We need an industry with enough resilience to benefit from offshore production when it comes and to survive when it does not.

It is a strong local sector – employing people, developing skills, training the new generation, innovating, turning over – that attracts international production in the first place, because they need to know that there are crews and creative talent trained, skilled and ready to start work.

Without a trained and equipped professional sector these international productions simply will not come.

## **3. The NSW problem**

Having said all of this, it remains clear that NSW – more than any other state – has dropped the ball. It must lift its game if it wants an industry here.

- production continues to decline in NSW at an alarming rate – and there is real danger that NSW's percentage of national production could fall below 50% for the first time in over ten years;

- the NSW Government has shown very few signs that it has a view about the future of the production sector within NSW. For example, the state's recently published draft strategic plan made almost no mention of the film sector, let alone the contribution of the arts to the future of the state;
- the state agency, the NSW FTO, continues to languish in terms of the funding available to it to both develop and fund projects, and its ability to provide incentives for production in the state.
- While other states are developing strategies for new media content production, no funding has been put in place to develop digital production in NSW. This is despite the fact that in companies like Animal Logic – a stone's throw away from this rally – are at the cutting edge of digital effects and production.

The NSW Government cannot blithely assume that this most mobile of industries will stay in the state simply because NSW has always been the centre of production. It will leave – and it already has begun to do so.

### **So why should they care?**

As has been mentioned Governments respond well to data – they like to know what an industry like ours contributes on a basic quantitative level. What they also respond well to is argument. In other words, why is our industry more important than any other? It is up to us to provide both the data and the arguments.

The NSW government needs to hear that a film production sector has many benefits – both direct and indirect – and that this has been acknowledged by federal and regional governments around the world. That the production sector is about jobs, the development of local and regional economies, it is about innovation, it is about tourism and it is about exports.

That it is also about the development of a creative industry – not an old economy but an industry of the future. It has been said that rights will be the currency of the new century – and we should stake our place in this future.

Most importantly, film production is ultimately about our culture. It is about us having a voice about us in our own language on both our screens and the world's screens. It is being a part of the most powerful communications mediums of our time.

In recent times much mention has been made about media ownership and control – precious little about content. Yet it is the content that is ultimately what speaks to us, and what we must be promoting and creating.

Both the Australian and the NSW Governments have invested a lot in what is among the best, most resourceful and creative production workforces in the world. If we are not able to capitalise on this investment, this will have been a seriously lost opportunity.