

National Cultural Policy Submission

Name: Women In Film and Television Australia

Submitted: On behalf of a not-for-profit arts organisation

IMPORTANT NOTE: We at WIFT Australia are submitting on behalf of our organisation's members, who have contributed to these responses. Our members are female or non-binary creatives/professionals working in the Australian screen industry.

At WIFT Australia (Women in Film and Television) our mission is to achieve gender equality in the film and television industry by supporting female identifying and non-binary individuals - through education, networking and advocacy - as they navigate the screen industry.

What challenges and opportunities do you see in the pillar or pillars most relevant to you?

First Nations

Recognise, respect and celebrate the centrality of First Nations cultures to the uniqueness of Australian identity.

Response by Teresa Ticehurst-Hall:

Ahhh the burden of taking ownership of the great privilege of calling oneself Indigenous.

I am a proud descendant of the Wambaya people from the Brunette Downs/Corella Creek area of the Northern Territory's Barkly Tableland. My grandmother was a member of the Stolen Generations. My great great grandmother witnessed the first Europeans arrive on her country and she, along with my great grandmother, worked the cattle on Brunette Downs station.

Growing up, it was a hidden fact, one to be taken to the grave - along with the whole Stolen Generation topic. It's time to turn the narrative around, to face the hard truths. Our forebears were storytellers and we, the creative women with a voice, now have a platform and an obligation to continue the tradition.

But this belonging, these connections, give me no greater right than any non-Aboriginal person, to give answers to how this should happen. And government, if it is serious about getting this right, shouldn't be looking for solid answers here. Government should be looking to put in place the processes to enable ongoing Indigenous-led control of the development and creation of all Indigenous art forms. Indigenous society thrives when self-determination and management is real, not tokenism.

It's a similar issue to the Uluru Statement from the Heart - if Indigenous Australia's central role in this country's culture is to be recognised, respected and celebrated, then this policy needs to offer an answer similar to the Voice to Parliament approach - through talking to mobs across the country, develop a means for Indigenous Australia to own and control how our stories are told; a means for me to be one part of an ongoing process, because this is far closer to our way than anything the current system offers.

A Place for Every Story

Ensure that government support reflects the diversity of Australia.

Our members stated that the Australian screen industry itself is not diverse, and therefore the stories created from it are not reflective of the diversity of Australia.

Members highlighted the fact that creatives from different socio-economic, multicultural, and gender-diverse backgrounds have very little opportunity within the sector. More specific points regarding this pillar are below:

- To ensure that government support reflects the diversity of Australia, creatives from marginalised backgrounds need to be included in policy and funding decisions.

- Diversity (including gender) targets set a standard and an ambition to achieve. They must be considered, so that the creative industries achieve greater diversity in all aspects — media ownership and leadership, investment, on-screen and behind-the-scenes roles, production and more. If people don't see themselves reflected in the screen industry, how will they know they can be involved? The government needs to be supporting writers, directors, producers, actors and crew from all backgrounds into creative positions.
- People with disabilities and from non-English speaking backgrounds do not have the same access to initiatives and funding, because communication systems don't meet their needs. This is something that needs to be fixed, in consultation with the people it directly affects.
- The screen industry is still heavily male-dominated. The government needs to support more female and non-binary screen practitioners.
- Priority needs to be given to fund screen stories with diverse messages that reflect issues that interest international and local viewers. Australia has amazing and diverse stories to tell, on all levels of our multicultural history, which are rarely reflected on screen.
- An easy and immediate change would be to celebrate our multicultural filmmakers and actors of colour who have found international success. Screen creatives like Margot Robbie, Russell Crowe and Baz Luhrmann are celebrated often. But Australia doesn't hear about, or celebrate, the successes of people like James Wan (director, writer, producer), Remy Hii (actor Spiderman: Far From Home), Keiynan Lonsdale (actor, singer, dancer), just to name a few. We chase diverse storytellers out of our country with our lack of support and then we ignore their success, which only perpetuates the cycle.
- A lack of financial accessibility is a huge barrier to the screen industry. It is an extremely difficult industry to break into (and work in) and financial instability is a regular feature. We need to find a solution to that, if we want anyone who is not from an already privileged background to be a part of it.

The Centrality of the Artist

Support excellence and the special role of artists and their creative collaborators.

Our members felt that the biggest way for artists to feel supported is through more funding, including investment opportunities (not just government funding), short film funding, local content quotas, childcare and maternity support, and potentially a universal basic income. More specific points regarding this pillar are below:

- Investment in creative industries must be substantially increased and diversity targets must be set within the investment strategies. The aim must be to transform our national cultural and creative pursuits and achievements, away from a white male-dominated system to one that is inclusive and actively promotes diversity in all creative mediums.
- There should be incentives for private investment in the screen industry beyond just a tax deduction for philanthropy, but for actual investment. This would minimise the pressure on government agencies to prop up our storytelling and also open up investments beyond screen agencies which gate-keep which stories get funded.
- The only way anyone can truly be supported to succeed in the Australian screen industry is when they have the money to focus on their craft. A universal basic income would be ideal, or at the very least, an increase in development grants.
- Competition for the current limited pool of funding is excessive. This leads to futile creative development, deep and enduring economic insecurity, hardship and exploitation, and despair for many creative artists, especially artists from marginalised groups and identities.

- There needs to be higher local content quotas, particularly for streaming services which is where the majority of productions are being made now. If more local content was being commissioned, there would be a lot more opportunities to develop authentic and unique projects. The Make it Australian campaign is focused on ensuring that global streaming services have some minimum investment levels of Australian content. The campaign proposes that 20% of a streaming company's local revenue be spent on Australian drama, documentary and children's content. Make it Australian is a joint campaign of the four main organisations that represent those working in Australia's screen industry (Australian Directors' Guild, Australian Writers' Guild, Media Entertainment & Arts Alliance and Screen Producers Australia).
- Something has got to change with maternity care and how we view mothers in the industry. "I personally am terrified of becoming a mother because I feel my working life will be over."
- "A crucial point in my early career was receiving funding for a short film". Short films are an important tool for filmmakers attempting to hone their voices and craft, and build a successful career. However short films are incredibly difficult (near impossible) to get funded these days. No-one is funding them unless they are a 'proof-of-concept' for a longer format, which requires substantial development of a feature or television project in order to simply get funding for that smaller proof-of-concept. All of Australia's successful film and television directors started out by making short films yet this essential career route is now closed off for our current emerging filmmakers. Short films are an extremely expensive undertaking and filmmakers' self-financing them by putting themselves into years of debt is not an option.

Strong Institutions

Strengthen the capacity of the cultural sector to contribute to national life, community wellbeing and the economy.

Our members felt that there are multiple things that can be done to strengthen the capacity of the Australian screen sector, many of which have already been mentioned in regards to other pillars (such as childcare, local content quotas, more funding). In addition to these, accountability for exclusionary behaviour and mental health support both came up as crucial industry needs. More specific points regarding this pillar are below:

- The extraordinary value of the creative industries needs to be reflected, including our contribution to GDP. All levels of government, philanthropy and the corporate sector must seize the opportunity to invest in the benefits that can be derived from creative industries. These benefits include economic growth, and employment; creative achievements; provoking new ideas and social change; social cohesion, healing and wellbeing. Australia's creative and cultural activity contributes more than \$111 billion - a 6.4 per cent share of our Gross Domestic Product and employs close to 600,000 people - 5.5 per cent of the workforce for the decade 2008 -2018. State and territory governments have increased per capita expenditure by 3.9 per cent on creative and cultural activities, while the federal government's per capita expenditure has fallen by 18.9 per cent. Needless to say, government funding does not reflect creative industries' economic contributions.
- More risk-taking needs to take place in content commissioning, which will only happen if there is more diversity at commissioning level. There also needs to be better advertising and support for diverse projects to ensure their success and longevity.
- Local content quotas will create more jobs, more opportunities, more screen stories, and as a result a more sustainable and robust screen industry.
- Accountability and actual consequences need to exist for bad, exclusionary or abusive behaviour on productions (at all levels, including producers and production executives).

Protocols need to be enforced, and cultural safety training made mandatory, to ensure that screen productions are safe and inclusive for all.

- There needs to be reasonable on-set hours across the screen industry, with fair breaks and turnaround times.

The government needs to support the creative and screen industries to provide:

- childcare options
- mental health support
- mentorships
- fair pay
- time and funding for project development

Recaching the Audience

Ensure Australian creativity thrives here and abroad in the digitally enabled 21st century

Stronger local content quotas have again come up by our members as a solution to ensuring Australian creativity thrives here and overseas. More specific points regarding this pillar are below:

Local content quotas for all streaming services are essential for a successful screen industry. Residual payments do not apply in streaming, so there needs to be something in place like a periodic renewal, i.e. if the streamer wants to keep the show on their platform, those who would receive residuals need to be paid again. Local content quotas would also ensure that Australian stories are continuously served to the Australian public.

A screen marketplace (like Cannes) that takes place in Australia to sell projects from, would bring investors into the country and take our projects out to international audiences.

The focus of what stories get funded needs to be bolder and braver. Funders need to take more risks. There needs to be less emphasis on making projects that come across like tourism advertisements, and more emphasis on putting authentic, strong and diverse stories on screen. Authenticity translates globally.

Please tell us how each of the 5 pillars are important to you and your practice and why.

First Nations

Recognise, respect and celebrate the centrality of First Nations cultures to the uniqueness of Australian identity.

We do not feel that it is appropriate for us to respond to this question, as it would not be an Indigenous-led response. Please ensure you seek contributions from First Nations creatives for this question.

A Place for Every Story

Ensure that government support reflects the diversity of Australia.

Older members and those living in regional areas feel that there are no opportunities for them to get their projects up and running and to tell their stories.

"As an over 40 year old, emerging filmmaker, living in the Peel Region there are zero opportunities for me. It is up to me to blaze my own trail. I do not tick enough diversity boxes."

The Centrality of the Artist

Support excellence and the special role of artists and their creative collaborators.

Members living in regional areas want more access to support. Members who have gained transferable skills in other roles within the industry, want these skills factored into funding and career progression decisions.

Organisations such as Screenworks (which supports and empowers screen creatives and crew across regional Australia) need more funding support so that they can deliver their much-needed services to regional creatives.

"I am still at the early stages of my career and would like to see opportunities to learn provided in regional areas, as well as access to local like-minded people and groups for support and mentoring."

"I would feel more supported if my experience in the industry as a whole and as a mother (multitasking etc) were factored into funding and my career progress."

Strong Institutions

Strengthen the capacity of the cultural sector to contribute to national life, community wellbeing and the economy.

Our members believe strongly in seeing increased accountability for safe work environments, and greater support for those entering the industry.

- There needs to be better conditions for people new to the industry in training roles (such as attachments or placements). These learning roles are often underpaid and overworked, with awful conditions. People in these roles are not in a position to speak up about it.
- There needs to be continued support of grassroots screen bodies (e.g. Wide Angle Tasmania), which are usually the first point of contact for screen creatives.

Reaching the Audience

Ensure Australian creativity thrives here and abroad in the digitally enabled 21st century.

Filmmakers who have been unable to access government funding have found it difficult to gain traction in their careers, and in some cases struggled to find an audience for their work. This is not only due to the lack of financial support, but also the lack of recognition and kudos that goes with having the support of funding bodies.

Are there any other things that you would like to see in a National Cultural Policy?

Our nation and funders must value creative artists, so the arts can go from being their side-hustle to full employment. Artists must be encouraged to collaborate, take risks and be innovative. We want to inspire, entertain, inform and heal our people and communities, but the limited funding environment makes us compete. This leads to disappointment, despair and economic hardship for creative artists. Instead of arts being our side-hustle, it must be our careers, offering security and full employment."

"Just more money and incentives for Australian content makers!"

"Let's acknowledge that working in the screen industry in Australia is a hard, frustrating slog at the best of times, and a financially unsustainable one at the worst. And then let's actually do something about it. Because otherwise, the same seven rich white guys are going to keep getting all the funding, opportunities and green lights."

GENDER EQUALITY should be a stand alone goal. The Gillard Government's Policy referenced UNESCO's international framework of 'cultural domains' as "a useful and inclusive way to measure culture and benchmark Australian achievements over the life of this policy. The domains break down some of the misconceived barriers between contemporary and historical practices, arts and creative industries, professional and amateur, commercial and 'non-profit' activities."

UNESCO's Culture 2030 Indicators lists Gender Equality as one of its 7 key dimensions and will measure "the objective and subjective gaps between women and men in their opportunities and rights to take part in cultural social, economic and political life."

Australia will be measured on gender equality, so let's make it a clear goal in our Cultural Policy to improve those opportunities and rights for women and non-binary creatives.