

21 May 2021

Documentary Australia Foundation response to “New rules for a new media landscape—modernising television regulation in Australia”

Documentary Australia Foundation represents the interests of documentary filmmakers and philanthropists in the documentary sector. Since 2008, Documentary Australia has overseen close to \$30million raised through philanthropy across 500+ documentary films. Documentary Australia Foundation has co-funded a significant number of Screen Australia supported documentaries, including over a third of the Screen Australia funded feature documentaries for cinematic release. We welcome the opportunity to comment on the Media Reform Green Paper.

Our response will focus largely on the proposed Create Australian Screen Trust (CAST) and the need for this fund to support telling Australian stories through the documentary sector, and in particular, supporting single, one-off Australian feature documentaries. With regards to the other proposed changes in the Media Reform Green Paper, we support the submission of the Screen Producers Australia.

One-off, single documentary feature films provide a significant cultural and social benefit to Australia – capturing and preserving our social, historical and political narratives (see Appendix 1). Single, or one-off feature documentaries, occupy a unique place in our screen industry. They are distinct from the broader category of "factual" for television, often finding and telling singular Australian stories.

With the creation of CAST, there needs to be a dedicated, secure and ongoing commitment to Australian documentary funding. Currently, the future of these types of productions is uncertain, with proposed changes the Australian Screen Production Incentives likely to have a devastating impact on Australian documentary. In particular, the raising of the QAPE threshold to \$1M from \$500,000 will adversely affect one off, feature documentaries – which have an average budget of \$618,000. These films tell the story of our nation – often on small

budgets and over many years. They are also where so much of Australia's talented filmmakers emerge. They are distinct from nearly every other category of film content and need to be treated as such, to ensure these stories can continue to be told and seen by Australian audiences.

Documentary Australian Foundation welcomes an increased investment in Australian content – but asks that documentary be recognised and safeguarded with these measures for the social and cultural value it offers. Documentaries capture our history and stories as they are happening. They are an invaluable part of our national story and should be valued as such.

Sincerely,



Dr Mitzi Goldman

CEO

Documentary Australia Foundation

Appendix 1: Case study snapshot of Australian feature documentaries with production budgets over \$500,000 but below \$1M

BACKTRACK BOYS

Audience

- 200,000+ viewers on SBS and NITV
- 25,000+ audiences in cinemas and communities around Australia
- 120+ community screenings and over 300 screening requests
- Almost 20 community events.

Theatrical release

- Released 2018, Umbrella Entertainment
- 44 screens grossing \$170,743
- About 12,319 tickets sold (based on average 2018 ticket price of \$13.86).

Excellence

- Audience Award for Best Documentary Top Five Sydney Film Festival
- Audience Awards for Best Documentary at Melbourne International Film Festival
- Audience Award for Best Documentary at Stronger Than Fiction Film Festival Canberra
- Best Documentary, Byron Bay Film Festival
- Audio Network Award for Best Editing in a Documentary Feature
- Film Critics Circle of Australia Best Feature Documentary
- Short List for AACTA Award for Best Documentary.

Social impact

- Over 90% of audiences reported an increased understanding of the need to divert young people from juvenile detention, were emotionally affected by the film and motivated to help, 80% had an improved understanding of the experiences of at-risk youth, half committed to donating to support youth initiatives



- Analysis of feedback from service providers and educators, including youth and juvenile justice workers, found that all agreed that the film: provides young people involved in juvenile justice with a positive narrative about themselves; supports the public to better understand young people's situations; and helps change conversations in communities about how to approach youth issues. All also agreed or strongly agreed the film was a useful tool for them in their work.
- Increased profile of the effective and innovative program Backtrack Youthworks, including Founder Bernie Shakeshaft winning the Australian Local Hero of the Year at the Australia Day Honours after being nominated by young inmates who saw the documentary in their correctional facility.
- Film screenings have raised funds for Backtrack Youthworks Programs, including 150 new donors and a multi-year major donor
- Youth and detention facility workers reported improved knowledge, skills and practice approaches as a result of watching the film in pilot screenings in juvenile detention centres and at the Annual FACS Practice Conference - rated as the third most useful out of 10 sessions
- Community screenings have already inspired the establishment of new programs based on the Backtrack Youthworks model including 'RuffTrack', 'Down The Track', and 'Making Tracks' in other regional towns, and 120+ communities expressing interest in Backtrack style programs.



IN MY BLOOD IT RUNS

Audience

- 458k viewers on ABC broadcast and iView
- 50+ impact screenings – including at Federal, NT, ACT and NSW Parliament, Department of Communities and Justice, all state and territory + NZ Children’s Commissioners, NTCOSS NT Council of Social Services and various government departments in education, justice and social services.
- 80+ Q&As hosted for audiences in over 30 countries
- 400+ workplace-hosted screenings
- 2500+ classrooms accessed film for free screenings plus thousands of others purchased via ATOM, Cool Australia and viewed on ABC iView.

Theatrical release

- Released 2020, Bonsai Films
- 18 screens grossing \$ 373,504.1 – ranking in the highest-grossing theatrical documentaries at the local box office in 2019/20
- About 26,340 tickets sold (based on average 2020 ticket price of \$14.18)
- Released in over 40 cinemas across Australia.

Excellence

- Official Selection Hotdocs 2019
- AFI DOCS Official Selection 2019
- Finalist Documentary Australia Foundation for Best Australian Documentary Sydney Film Festival 2019
- Official Selection Melbourne International Film Festival 2019 Top 10 Feature Documentaries Audience Award 8th
- Nominated AACTA Award for Best Documentary
- Official Selection DOC NYC 2019.

Social impact

- \$127,000 raised to date to establish a school at Mpweringke Anapipe through the Children’s Ground “Education For All” campaign.

- \$75,000 raised for immediate COVID-19 relief to support Aboriginal communities to prepare for COVID-19 (including \$7,000 from ticket sales and \$68,000 from a GoFundMe co-presented by the film)
- \$12,000 in pay-it-forward licenses to support screenings in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities
- Dajuan, the key protagonist in the film, was the youngest person to address UNHRC bringing messages from the Australian community to the international human rights audience at age 12
- Dajuan was painted by Blak Douglas for Archibold Portrait Prize as formal recognition of Dajuan as an ‘influencing public figure of Australia’

Megan, another key protagonist, was a finalist for NT Australian of the Year, nominated by a viewer of the film and selected in top four finalists from 6,000 nominees.