

24 June 2020

Public Submission

Screen Australia and the Australian Communications and Media Authority (ACMA) Options paper - Supporting Australian stories on our screens

I welcome the opportunity to provide feedback on this paper, which in itself responds to the Australian Competition and Consumer Commission's Digital Platforms Inquiry (DPI).

Savage Films' focus and the singular message of this submission is that it is imperative to the sustainability of Australia's feature film sector that the level of producer offset rebate to qualifying Australian feature films made for theatrical exhibition remains at 40%.

Making a 25% cut to the offset for cinematic features (from 40% to 30%) as contemplated in the Options paper and public discussion, risks decimating the Australian feature film landscape.

The DPI primarily explores, and Screen Australia and the ACMA were asked to consider, content obligations on free-to-air television broadcasters and subscription video-on-demand services. While the paper has taken the opportunity to address government intervention and support for Australian screen content more broadly, because it acknowledges that specific challenges for features exist but its scope has not enabled a full assessment of them, and the DPI does not reference feature films, it would be wise to undertake a substantive review of the feature sector if changes to the producer offset for cinematic features are to be contemplated.

This point speaks to the phrase 'harmonisation of the offset' utilised in discussion around the Options paper which sounds tidy but creates a misleading picture because the story-structures, pathways to audience and business models that underpin cinematic works, television series, web series and other screen content, vary considerably.

It would be disastrous to the Australian screen industry and Australian community, if the response to the DPI, focussed on how to best support Australian stories on our screens, inadvertently caused their removal from our cinemas.

By way of example, our latest feature film High Ground starring Simon Baker alongside newcomer Jacob Junior Nayinggul from the remote community of Gunbalanya in Arnhem Land, produced with Bunya Productions and Maxo Studios, was honoured with a Gala World Premiere at the Berlin International Film Festival 2020, a high accolade for Australian culture and Australian storytelling benefitting all individuals, communities, companies and agencies involved and I put forward that if the producer offset rebate to feature films had been 30% High Ground is unlikely to have ever been made.

Savage Films is also a signatory to Arenamedia's submission, which we wholeheartedly support.

Maggie Miles
Creative Producer/Writer

Feature producing credits: High Ground, Paper Planes, The Turning, Guilty, Van Diemen's Land, Force of Destiny