



Ruth Harley
Chief Executive
New Zealand Film Commission
PO Box 11546
WELLINGTON

(sent unsigned, by email)

5 May, 2004.

Dear Ruth and Barrie,

Thank-you for this opportunity to comment on the draft strategic plan for the New Zealand Film Commission for 2004-2007.

SPADA congratulates the NZFC on the many initiatives that have occurred since the previous strategic plan which have contributed to the overwhelmingly positive perception that the New Zealand Film industry is now enjoying.

In particular SPADA commends the efforts to develop a closer and more productive working relationship with filmmakers and their representative organisations.

The following comments have been devised and approved by the SPADA Film sub-committee and incorporate the views of the broader SPADA membership. It is important to note however that SPADA feels that any conclusive comment is, at this time, difficult given the lack of detail around the initiatives proposed in this document.

Future

SPADA is very supportive of the strategic initiative to develop a stronger partnership approach with filmmakers and relevant organisations. SPADA strongly believes that a united approach to the issues that face those working in the film sector in New Zealand is the most effective strategy to promote a vibrant and sustainable industry. Given the NZFC's stated commitment to partnership, SPADA suggests the following amendment to the NZFC's vision statement

To have a leadership role, in partnership with the film industry, in developing NZ's national cinema on a sustainable basis within the global industry.

Strategic Initiatives

5.1

Introduction

SPADA feels it is inappropriate for the NZFC to include the second paragraph under this heading. To state that there are conflicting interests within the domestic industry will only foster the negative perception of disunity that the domestic industry encounters at government level. The industry has, in recent months, made significant improvements in presenting a united voice on major issues. Anticipating conflict contradicts the NZFC's stated aims to work in partnership with the industry.

Communication

SPADA endorses moves towards improved communication and feels that the recent board and senior staff-to-industry briefings have been both welcome and effective initiatives in this area. SPADA suggests holding regular industry functions of this nature. Open and direct access to Board members and a responsive and effective approach to industry communication will assist in the continued improvement of the relationship between the agency and the industry

Auckland office

SPADA fears that the establishment of a small Auckland office could result in administrative duplication. SPADA urges the commission to carefully consider whether this initiative would recoup the resources that would be required to set-up this office.

5.2

Investment in Film makers

SPADA supports the NZFC's continuing investment in the upskilling of writers, producers, directors and actors and recommends that the NZFC continues to work with SPADA and industry guilds to achieve the most relevant and targeted training and upskilling opportunities.

Investment in Film Projects

SPADA welcomes the NZFC's commitment to increasing budgets for feature films. It is widely known that real costs of production for feature films have increased substantially as the New Zealand film industry has developed and matured.

SPADA strongly recommends that the NZFC commission research into what the current costs for a feature film are. SPADA supports an approach that does not set funding ceilings on feature films, but rather judges each film individually and sets project-appropriate funding. Research into the actual costs of feature film production will assist not only in this decision-making process but also in government advocacy around feature film production.

Although not outlined in the current draft, SPADA would like to see the NZFC develop funding and equity models which offer incentives to filmmakers that enable them to benefit from the financial success of their films.

The strategic plan draft states that the primary purpose of the film commission is:

“To contribute to the cultural-capital of New Zealand through the development, production financing and marketing of audience-focussed feature films; and to grow the film sector within the larger screen production industry”

The fulfillment of this purpose does not require an aggressive equity stance by the NZFC. It requires that feature films are successfully produced. This equity position is also counter-productive to the growth of the film industry, as it does not adequately allow for the sustainability, independence and growth of the production companies involved in the feature film industry.

A risk and reward model of investment in feature film is a paradigm that SPADA advocates for. The organisation believes that incentivising and encouraging success must become an integral part of the NZFC’s negotiations with producers. Doing so will promote the development of an entrepreneurial culture that will ensure the sustainability and growth of the domestic industry. Growth of the film sector is one of the wider objectives of Government.

Development

SPADA feels that the increased investment and focus on development has been a successful policy. In light of this, SPADA would like to see the funding allocated to development remain at 15% of the overall budget as opposed to the drop to 11% that is currently being proposed.

Digital Films

SPADA endorses the NZFC’s plans to support digital filmmakers but it must be reiterated each film, digital or otherwise, should be judged individually. SPADA feels that setting up a specific fund is not the most effective way to support filmmakers working in this area and risks ghettoising digital filmmakers and creating more administrative work.

Signature Television

SPADA does not support this initiative being funded by the NZFC. One of the justifications for Signature Television is that it constitutes talent development for practitioners working towards feature film production. SPADA believes these objectives will be met through a commitment to funding digital films.

Signature Television also muddies the waters of contestable and direct funding for TVNZ for local content and unsettles the television industry because it does not believe that the NZFC is necessarily equipped to understand television network needs in drama.

The Film Fund

Although not addressed in this document, SPADA strongly supports the continuation of the Film Fund. SPADA encourages multiple funding pathways as a key screen production industry principle and agrees with the Screen Council’s recommendation for the continuation and re-investment into a separate body designed to support the production of larger budget New Zealand feature films.

5.3

SPADA supports moves by the NZFC to improve domestic market performance and encourage the development of increased professional relationships between the NZFC sales agency and filmmakers.

Again it is difficult to conclusively comment on the initiatives outlined in this section without further information on how they will be implemented.

Overall SPADA supports the importance of the ability for producers to choose. In this case, the choice relates to the best sales agency for each project.

In many cases the NZFC sales agency will be the most appropriate choice but it is imperative that the Commission works in partnership with the producer to make this decision.

SPADA again thanks the commission for the opportunity to assist with the drafting of a strategic plan that serves both the New Zealand Film Commission and one of its key clients the New Zealand filmmaker. We would be happy to clarify or further discuss any of the points raised in this letter.

Penelope Borland
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