
Archive Forum

Martha Ansara, Dr Ina Bertrand (Chair), Anthony Buckley AM, Peter Butt, Prof. Ann Curthoys, Ray Edmondson OAM (Secretary), David Francis OBE, Tom Jeffrey AM, James Malone, Dr Sigrid McCausland, Sue Milliken, Chris Puplick, Graham Shirley, Merle Thornton, Dr Deb Verhoeven, Dr Mike Walsh, Storry Walton AM, John Weiley

www.afiresearch.rmit.edu.au/archiveforum



**Statement
22 August 2004**

'Directions' by stealth

We call for the Australian Film Commission (AFC) to be held to account for its custodianship of the National Film and Sound Archive, ScreenSound, since its takeover in July 2003.

We call on the AFC to explain why, having presented its 'Directions' proposals in December 2003 for public scrutiny and feedback, it has ignored the advice of the general public, of constituents and stakeholders, and of those who have lodged submissions and recommendations in good faith. We further call on the AFC to explain how it is going to respond to this immense accumulated input, and to open up the renewed process of consultation.

We call on the AFC to explain why, despite its having been so widely discredited, the 'Directions' agenda has not been withdrawn but has been pursued regardless.

We call on the AFC to declare the full cost to public funds of the following:

- The relocation of the Archive's Melbourne office, the payout of the current lease, and the staff time wasted
- Performance bonuses paid to any AFC personnel in connection with its administration of the Archive
- The running of the "stakeholder forums" in January/February, including travel and accommodation costs for AFC and Archive staff, AFC Board members, chair Professor Mark Armstrong, and costs of administration
- The PALM consultancy on change management, the Emery Vincent Design consultancy on branding, and any other consultancies relating to the Archive
- The production and presentation of 'The Canberra Files' in the Parliament House Theatre on 3 August, including fees for the producers and presenters, attendance of all AFC personnel, and all airfares and accommodation.
- The premiere and national tour of *The Sentimental Bloke*, including airfares and accommodation for related personnel.
- The amalgamation and interfacing of the dissimilar AFC and Archive computer systems
- Total staff time consumed in the "review" of the Archive since July 2003

In the interests of public accountability, we call on the AFC or its Minister, to make public the following documents:

- The final report, including the terms of reference and recommendations, of the Review of Cultural Institutions of 2002/3, from which the merger of the AFC and Archive arose
- The terms of reference and reports of the PALM, Emery Vincent and other consultancies

We call on the AFC to conscientiously respond to *Cinderella Betrayed*, Archive Forum's own detailed response to 'Directions', submitted in January in response to the AFC's invitation. We call for an explanation of why it, together with the Forum's more recent alternative proposals on a research centre, an advisory committee, and on preserving the identity and status of the Archive, have been ignored.

We call on the AFC to demonstrate the sincerity of its claims to be consultative, for the only conclusion possible from its actions to date is one of insincerity from the outset. It appears more interested in exerting control over the Archive and its resources than in being a competent and responsive custodian of a national institution. This is a betrayal of the public interest which the AFC is supposed to serve.

Background

On 12 December 2003 the Australian Film Commission issued its 'Directions' paper, setting out what it claimed to be "proposals" for the future development of the National Film and Sound Archive (ScreenSound). It publicly invited comments on the proposals.

In January/February 2004 it ran a series of closely-managed 'stakeholder forums' in the eastern capital cities, ostensibly to gain feedback on its proposals.

The resulting 140-plus submissions, and transcripts of the 'stakeholder forums', have been posted on its website (www.afc.gov.au) It is obvious from these, from much other public comment, and from subsequent events that the "Directions" paper has been widely discredited and its agenda publicly rejected. Thousands have called for the "demerging" of the AFC/Archive marriage. Both Labor and the Greens have publicly committed to do this, and to create the Archive as a separate statutory authority. Meanwhile, the AFC has been called on to act only as caretaker of the Archive and stop dismantling its structure.

The incoming Director of the Archive, Dr Paolo Cherchi Usai, who does not take up his post until mid-September, has been told by the AFC that 'Directions' is now only a "group of issues" to be addressed and that he is not to feel bound by them.

Despite all this, an undeterred AFC has continued to ignore constituents and implement 'Directions' by stealth:

- It has failed in its moral and professional obligation to respond to the huge backlog of public submissions, despite public calls to do so.
- It has failed to respond to the feedback given in the expensively staged 'stakeholder forums', which begs the question of why they were held

- It has failed to respond to a February statement signed by eminent persons calling for a moratorium on structural changes and for renewed consultation
- Despite prior knowledge and an invitation to the Minister, it ignored a conference on 'The future of the Archive' in July. It has failed to respond to its recommendations.
- It is pursuing a pointless and expensive re-removal of the Archive's Melbourne office, itself relocated just before the AFC's takeover, to force its co-location with the AFC
- It is pre-emptively funding research on 'Directions' proposals before the new Director takes office
- It is wasting public funds on the expensive forced amalgamation of dissimilar computer systems
- It is funding expensive promotional exercises to subordinate the Archive's identity and achievements to the AFC brand, such as its current promotional tour of the *The Sentimental Bloke*
- It has put the Archive's long standing membership of FIAF (International Federation of Film Archives) at risk
- It has broken "iron-clad" Ministerial promises about the retention of senior Archive positions in Canberra, and the protection of the Archive's autonomy and identity
- In Senate Estimates hearings it has stonewalled due process to inhibit being called to public account for its actions
- Despite opportunities to do so, the Minister has chosen to not appoint archivally qualified people to its Board

End Document