

Deborah Sims from the ABA's Australian Content section reports on the push for local content quotas in New Zealand, evident at the 1999 SPADA conference, which was held from 18–20 November.

## New Zealand local content public awareness campaign unveiled at SPADA Conference

A series of eight cinema advertisements featuring Kiwi screen and music stars promoting the need for New Zealand local content rules was previewed at the recent Screen Producers and Directors Association (SPADA) Conference in Wellington. The Local Content Initiative will run on 140 cinemas screens in New Zealand over the coming months, with Village Force -Hoys Cinemas providing free time for the advertisements.

The question of local content quotas for New Zealand television was a major theme of the conference. Also discussed was a charter for TVOne, one of the two channels operated by public broadcaster TVNZ, that would make it into the 'New Zealand channel'.

Conference discussion indicated that delegates were aware that New Zealand's CER obligations would require any quota to include Australian programs. There was less obvious recognition of New Zealand's GATS commitment which appears to expressly prohibit New Zealand from introducing any such barriers to trade in services.

John Barnett, Managing Director of South Pacific Pictures and member of the SPADA Executive, outlined one possible prime time quota points system (covering 6 p.m. to midnight) which awarded most points to programs in the 8.30 – 9.30 p.m. slot. He also identified six program categories for local quotas: drama, documentary, children's programs, children's drama, maori and performance.

Conference sessions drew strongly on the experiences of successful New Zealand film and program makers. These

included expatriate New Zealand producers such as Tim Bevan, co-founder and co-chairman of Working Title Films (*Notting Hill* and *Elizabeth*) and Lloyd Phillips (*12 Monkeys*) who is currently producing the blockbuster *The Vertical Limit* in Queenstown. Young Kiwi success stories included the team that made the popular hit *Scarfi* which has taken more than NZ\$1 million (A\$800 000) at the NZ box office.

Tim Bevan stressed that the three most important factors for both a successful producer and a successful national production industry are development, development and development. As a member of the UK Film Council which distributes £30 million (A\$76 million) of lottery money to the film industry (half to three franchisees), his aim is to dedicate the £15 million (A\$38 million) available for allocation each year to development only, with not one penny of this public money being used to support actual production.

Each of the three main free-to-air television channels presented sessions discussing their target demographics and the role New Zealand local content plays in their schedules. The broadcasters all acknowledged that New Zealand programs were among the top rating shows on television, with some New Zealand companies wanting to advertise only within local programs and being willing to pay more to do so.

All three broadcasters said they had ratings success with New Zealand documentaries. TV2 (the entertainment-focussed TVNZ channel that has no news or current affairs programming) stated that it too wanted to develop a

branded documentary stream similar to those of the other channels. It is looking for fast-paced documentaries with strong narrative structures.

TV2 broadcasts the popular New Zealand soap 'Shortland Street' but also wants to do more local drama. TVOne has a New Zealand sit com lined up for 2000, with another in development. Both TVOne and TV3 stated that their main priority is building a long-running successful New Zealand one-hour drama series. Each is intending to take time to get it right, with 2001 being the earliest possible broadcast date.

Kirstin Marlowe, the new Director of Programming for TV3 and TV4, said that she was also hoping to develop an additional one-hour drama series as what she described as the 'first Project Blue Sky work'. She said that she has good contacts at both Network Ten in Australia (as a former Head of Programming at the network) and CanWest globally (having help set up its new Irish network) and thinks that it is possible to develop a drama that works in both countries. Although she has already begun talking to Ten about such a drama series her first aim is to develop a New Zealand drama series for TV3.

The Mayor of Wellington, Mark Blumsky, hosted the opening night cocktail party with great enthusiasm. He said that Peter Jackson bringing *Lord of the Rings* to Wellington was a lucky break but that his aim is to turn the current joke of 'Wellywood' into an on-going reality.