



For a policy which had been through as many hands and eyes as last October's federal cultural policy statement, *Creative Nation* contained one big surprise.

Rupert Murdoch was going to set up a show in Sydney.

The place where residents of Australia's biggest city had come for 113 years, to spend their Easters amidst the bush's prized produce and the city's sideshows, was about to become an international movie studio. Hollywood was coming to town.

The Prime Minister's announcement of the Fox studio may, to some, have sat uneasily in the centre of the country's first cultural policy statement.

That was the point.

This cultural policy was as much about the box - TV and new media - as it was about the traditional arts which hung from the walls of the National Gallery in Canberra where the policy was launched.

Keating, that day, strode through the crowd a king - a king who had delivered to a community which had acquired a special place in his prime-ministership. They had been the players and spectators in another event the previous year at Sydney's State Theatre, credited with turning around an election campaign that was smelling of death.

They were also - they were told, they believed - the keys to a new kind of Australia, an inventive, assured, wealthier place. A Creative Nation.

The year since *Creative Nation* has seen an astonishing amount of activity the media, arts and communications - the areas the statement saw as central to the development of this Australia.

The Government announced in August a major package of reforms in telecommunications designed to encourage new players into the industry, new services and more competition. It continued the decisive shift

away from the maintenance of a state-owned enterprise as the primary vehicle for social policy in telecommunications, towards a greater reliance on the market place as an engine of economic and social prosperity.

Another state enterprise, the ABC, found its place in the new media market was more tendentious. A conspicuous omission from *Creative Nation's* largesse, the original national broadcaster spent 1995 distancing itself from an era of creeping commercialisation, following revelations in a story on Kerry Packer's Nine network. There was a lot of talk about the Charter and a new CEO was found.

The ABC, the rooster of pay TV policy in 1993, became the feather duster of cultural policy in 1994 and telecommunications policy in 1995.

A venture into pay TV, forced on an unwilling Government by the Senate, collapsed because the pay TV gatekeepers wouldn't buy its output and the rules of access to pay TV distribution systems didn't make them.

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Another king was 'content'. New organisations - the Australian Multimedia Enterprise, the Australian Commercial Television Production Fund - opened their doors and Co-operative Multimedia Centres were chosen. Established organisations - the Australian Film Commission, the Australian Film, TV and Radio School, the Australian Children's TV Foundation, and the Australia Council - got money to do new things with new technologies.

Hilary McPhee, the Chair of the Australia Council, complained that

the content creators didn't seem to know how good they had it. Some of the content creators suggested that the patrons should stick to their patronage.

The Australian Broadcasting Authority settled a new Australian Content Standard for commercial TV, increasing the amounts of Australian programs, especially documentaries and children's drama to be screened, but liberalising the tests of 'Australianness' required for the quotas.

The ABA also released guidelines explaining the way a new form of regulation of Australian content - the requirement for pay TV licensees to spend 10 per cent of the program expenditure of 'predominantly drama channels' on new Australian drama - would work.

The Government put media and communications in the centre of policy development, setting up a special Ad Hoc Committee of Cabinet; a National Information Services Council, chaired by the Prime Minister, to provide industry and community input to government policy; and a Chief Government Information Officer to co-ordinate a substantial part of the Government's own participation in new information services.

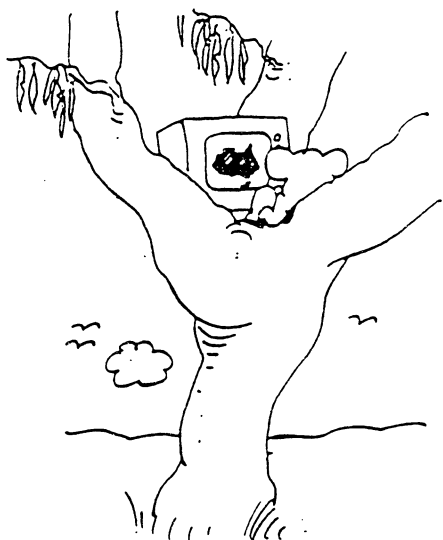
With clear political will to make, and act upon, the complex intellectual connections between communications and the arts, the Government's amalgamation of these two departments some months before *Creative Nation* bore fruit. The possibilities of collaboration between these areas were exploited; and the ill-chosen marriage with the Department of Transport, irretrievably broken down before the first date, was finally annulled.

The relationship between government, the media and culture in Australia has always been close and heavy with patronage. Governments have helped media owners and artists to do what they want.

Murdoch's decision to develop the



Fox studio in Sydney was reported to be the price Keating extracted for what Murdoch had got out of Australia. While Murdoch planned his side of this alleged deal, another media owner, Kerry Packer, was falling out with the Government, allegedly over telecommunications policy. Optus in which Packer had proposed to invest put up a plan for regional cable monopolies around the country. The Government - both the architect of media industry structure and the sole shareholder of the dominant player - said no, feeling the plan would reduce competition and dramatically reduce the value of the national telecommunications carrier.



As the year since *Creative Nation* closed, the Prime Minister complained at a Sydney Theatre Company fundraiser that 'the people who have most of the money never come to things like this. You know, if we could get Kerry or Rupert here and spend a bit of money on theatre instead of just the football'.

It was a call from the patron of *Creative Nation* to the kings of established media businesses to lay down some of their arms from the the new media battle - to spend a little time and money to become patrons of some old culture themselves. □

Jock Given

Creative Nation: report card

TELEVISION

Australian Commercial Television Production Fund

\$60m over three years for commercial networks to produce quality drama. Includes: \$9m a year to metropolitan commercial networks; \$9m to independent TV producers and \$2m for children's productions. So far, a board and CEO have been appointed and the Fund has been attached to the Australian Film Commission (chaired by the AFC's Sue Milliken). Guidelines for applications have been drawn up and first applications for funding to be received in December.

SBS Independent

\$13m to SBS over four years for independent productions. So far, \$1 million has been allocated and work started on 15 new productions, including three feature films, three dramas, six documentaries and a comedy.

MULTIMEDIA

Australian Multimedia Enterprise

\$45.2m over three years to establish a wholly-government owned company to encourage investment in Australian multimedia products and services. So far, the money is in the bank. Board formed and staff recruited. Guidelines for funding applications set. The first round of applications closed 20 October.

Cooperative Multimedia Centres

\$56m set aside for up to seven years to establish six centres which would bring together the required expertise to support a multimedia industry. So far, two consortia have been invited to establish CMCs - chosen from 18 applicants. No money disbursed yet.

Interactive Multimedia Forums

A series of industry forums sponsored by departments of Employment, Education and Training and Industry, Science and Technology. Designed to bring together experts on multimedia content, marketing and export. Promised: \$3.9 million. Delivered: \$975,000

Australia on CD

\$6.9 million over two years for ten state of the art CD ROMs on Australian cultural themes for use in schools and overseas trade missions. So far, five CD ROM titles have been chosen and a number of agencies commissioned to produce them. Delivered: \$3.963 million

Australian Film Commission

\$5.25 million over four years to develop creative multimedia projects.

Australian Film, TV and Radio School

\$950,000 over four years to extend professional training in new media.

Australian Children's TV Foundation

\$700,000 over four years for 'quality' educational multimedia projects.

FILM STUDIO

In *Creative Nation* announcement, PM Keating says Twentieth Century Fox will be invited to build a film studio at Sydney Showgrounds site. So far, Fox Filmed Entertainment in negotiations with Carr Labor Government to develop plan for Showgrounds. Considerable community and local council protest at State Government's proposal to remove planning authority from the local council. Independent Commission Against Corruption asked to investigate the issue by State independent MP, Clover Moore.