

# Warner Roadshow boosts Qld production figures

*The AFC's 1996 national production survey tracks the film industry's continuing volatility.*

**T**he Australian Film Commission's 1995/96 national production survey shows substantial increases in feature film and television mini-series production, the continuing importance of government and overseas finance, and Queensland's partial eclipsing of the traditional production centres of Sydney and Melbourne.

The AFC's annual survey covers feature films and independent TV drama production made by Australian companies or by foreign companies in Australia. This is estimated to represent around 14% of the total value of audio-visual production in Australia. It excludes other areas such as television commercials, corporate communications, inhouse television production, music video and interactive media production.

1995/96 showed again the volatility of feature film production. Thirty features commenced principal photography, up 50% on the previous year but one fewer than 1993/94. The total production value, \$221 million, was nearly double the value in 1994/95 but only slightly higher than the value in 1993/94. As always, much of the increase in total production value came from a handful of big budget, predominantly foreign-financed projects. Seven films were made with budgets of more than \$6 million (of which three were more than \$20 million) compared with three in 1994/95.

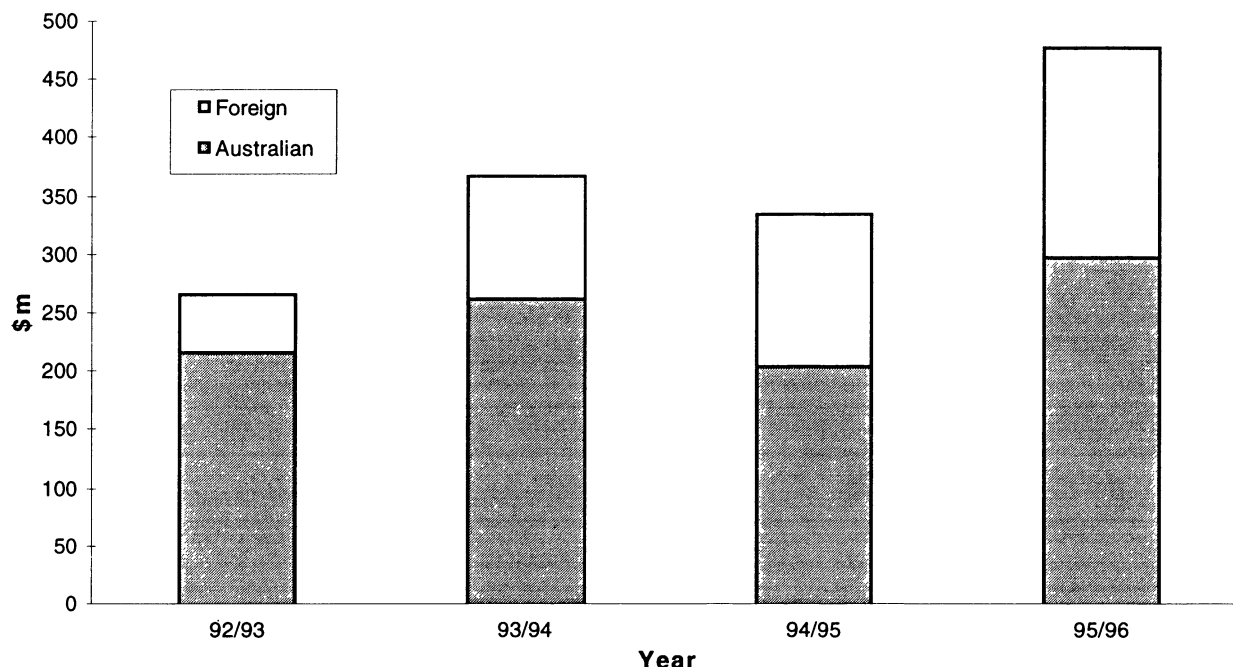
Television mini-series production was also up substantially, from 12 projects worth \$69 million to 17 projects worth \$129 million, a huge increase on the four projects worth \$33 million in 1993/94. Nine of the

mini-series in 1995/96 were children's programs and four were 'long form' mini-series (two series of *Water Rats*, a second series of *Fire* and the curiously classified fourth series of *Banjo Paterson's The Man from Snowy River* (20x42 minute episodes).

Series and serials production increased in number from 17 to 20, but declined in value from \$98 million to \$91 million. Telemovies fell in both number, from 22 to 18, and value, from \$54 million to \$38 million.

Of the 85 feature films and television dramas covered by the survey, Australian government agencies (principally the Film Finance Corporation and the Commercial TV Production Fund, in its first year of operation) provided the principal source of funding for around half. Around a quarter of the projects were principally funded by overseas investors

**Film and Independent TV Drama Production**





and a quarter were principally funded by Australian commercial broadcasters and private investors. Australian private and commercial sources were much more substantial contributors to independent TV drama productions than they were to feature film production.

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A number of very expensive projects in Queensland boosted that state's share of the total value of production occurring in Australia to 35%, above the 29% taken by both NSW and Victoria. This is the first time in the eight years of the survey that NSW has not had the largest share of production activity. However, the share of total production activity accounted for by Queensland production companies was much lower, demonstrating that the Queensland boom still primarily comprises off-shore projects shot at the Gold Coast Warner Roadshow studio, rather than locally-originated ones.

Production industry magazine *Encore* recently quoted Warner Roadshow Studio head Michael Lake saying 'The studio's basically full throughout the year'. He acknowledged the importance of Queensland government assistance measures such as payroll tax rebates on projects where more than \$3.5 million is spent in the State, crew subsidies and the elimination of police, fire and location charges in attracting interstate and off-shore production to Queensland. □

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**Copies of the survey are available from the Australian Film Commission - (02) 9321 6444; FREECALL 1800 22 6615; Fax (02) 9357 3714; <http://www.afc.gov.au>; email - [info@afc.gov.au](mailto:info@afc.gov.au)**

## Inquiry into local content on pay TV

THE ABA has released an information paper on Australian content on pay TV as the first step in its investigation of these issues. The Minister for Communications and the Arts, Senator Alston, directed the ABA to conduct this investigation on 17 September 1996. In doing so, the Minister was carrying out his obligation under section 215 of the Broadcasting Services Act to conduct a review of Australian content on pay TV before 1 July 1997, including the feasibility of increasing to 20% the level of expenditure required under section 102.

The information paper identifies a number of issues on which the ABA is seeking input:

- the amount, range and type of Australian programming broadcast on pay TV;
- the practical operation of section 102 of the Act - this is particularly significant given the legal difficulties highlighted by the ABA's development of guidelines concerning the operation of the section. These guidelines note the inappropriateness of the current legislative approach to the actual corporate structures being used in the pay TV business;
- the implications of increasing to 20% the level of expenditure required;
- the implications of extending Australian content requirements to all pay TV services, not just predominantly drama services;
- the feasibility of extending to pay TV licensees the same or similar Australian content requirements as presently apply to commercial

television licensees;

- alternative mechanisms for encouraging expenditure on Australian produced programs and for identifying the level of Australian

content in programs transmitted by pay TV licensees; and

- possible legislative models for varying the Australian content obligations on pay TV licensees.

The ABA has requested submissions in its initial consultative process by Wednesday 18 December 1996.

In undertaking its investigation, the ABA

will be assisted by a study being undertaken by the BTCE examining;

- the likely level of expenditure on Australian drama by subscription television broadcast channels if section 102 of the Act had operated as envisaged;
- the capacity of the Australian film and television production industry to supply additional Australian programming; and
- the implications of increased production of Australian content for Commonwealth and State film and television assistance programs.

The review of Australian content on pay TV is happening alongside the Gonski review of film assistance arrangements and the reconsideration of the treatment of New Zealand programs under the Australian content standard, prompted by the legal action taken by New Zealand's Project Blue Sky lobby group [see *CU* 124 p 19, *CU* 125 pp 18-19].

The ABA will make its final report to the Minister by 30 April 1997. □

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