



# Good year for Australian film and TV production

*With overall budgets increasing and further funding assured – at least for the immediate future – the domestic industry can afford to bathe in the glory of good figures for 1996-97*

**O**verall production budgets in feature films and independent television dramas increased by 12 per cent or \$62 million compared to 1995-96, according to the Australian Film Commission's annual survey.

The survey's key findings were as follows:

- 87 projects (feature films and TV drama programs) worth a total of \$561 million were produced by the independent sector in 1996-97;
- Of the 87 projects, 33 were mainly financed by Australian government sources (compared to 43 in the previous year), 23 were mainly financed by overseas investors (the same as last year) and 31 were mainly financed by Australian commercial broadcasters and private investors (mainly production/distribution companies) compared to 20 last year;
- The value of Australian feature production rose by \$41 million, an increase of 46 per cent over 1995-96;
- Television drama budgets were up by \$54 million on last year's total – a rise for the fourth year in a row. The value of Australian productions rose by \$28.5 million; and
- Expenditure in Australia (production and post-production) rose for the fourth consecutive year, increasing by nine per cent over 1995-96 to \$410 million.

Released late November 1997, the survey covers feature films and independent television drama programs made by Australian production com-

panies, or by foreign companies in Australia. The productions should have commenced principal photography between July 1, 1996 and June 30, 1997. The figures (which do not include inhouse television drama productions or overseas-based production by Australian companies) are compatible with industry sectors as defined by the Australian Bureau of Statistics.

The AFC survey covers roughly 23 per cent of total audiovisual production in Australia which is estimated at \$1.3 billion and includes areas such as commercials, corporate communications, inhouse television production, music video and interactive media production.

For feature films, the value of 1996-97 production increased compared to last year's result. There were 39 films produced with a total worth of \$249 million. These included 34 titles worth \$130 million and five foreign titles worth \$119 million. The five foreign films include three made by Australian production companies shooting overseas (*Tarzan and Jane*, *Aberration* and *Wish*) and two features (worth \$67 million) shot in Australia by overseas production companies, one from the U.S. and the other from Korea. In 1995-96, there were five foreign films shot in Australia totalling \$132 million.

In addition, there were two official co-productions in 1996-97, *Welcome to Woop Woop* with the U.K., and *Love in Ambush* with France.

Budgets for 1996-97 Australian feature films ranged from less than \$1

million up to \$20 million. The two main genres continued to be drama (12 titles, 35 per cent) and comedy (11 titles, 32 per cent). Three children's adventures, two action and six thrillers were made. The five foreign features had one each in comedy, drama, action, adventure and thriller.

The main investor in 16 of the 34 features was the Australian government, through the Film Finance Corporation (FFC). The increase in budget – from \$41 million in 1995-96 to \$62 million this year – was largely due to three higher budget titles.

Analysis of actual contributions from each type of investor shows that the contribution of private sources rose from \$16 million last year to \$36 million in 1996-97. Government sources funded the same share of budgets as last year (42 per cent) and the foreign component fell from 40 per cent to 30 per cent in 1996-97.

For the third consecutive year, the value of television drama production increased with more series produced with budgets of \$6 million and over, and one mini-series in the \$20 million-plus range.

Last year, 48 independent programs began production, totalling \$312 million. Of these, 40 were Australian production worth \$236 million. The value of foreign TV drama rose to \$76 million for eight productions compared to \$50 million for nine productions in 1995-96.

Mini-series production declined from \$117 million in 1995-96 to \$97 million. Government sources provided most of the funding for four



## Survey Summary

	Australian		Foreign		Total	
	No.	\$M	No.	\$M	No.	\$M
<b>1993-94</b>						
Features	29	141	2	69	31	210
Mini-series	3	19			4	19
Series and serials	16	90	1	24	16	114
Telemovies	11	12	3	12	14	24
<b>Total</b>	<b>59</b>	<b>262</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>105</b>	<b>65</b>	<b>367</b>
<b>1994-95</b>						
Features	18	43	2	70	20	113
Mini-series	11	54			11	54
Series and serials	15	80	3	33	18	113
Telemovies	18	28	4	25	22	53
<b>Total</b>	<b>62</b>	<b>205</b>	<b>9</b>	<b>128</b>	<b>71</b>	<b>333</b>
<b>1995-96</b>						
Features	25	89	6	152	31	241
Mini-series	13	86	2	31	15	117
Series and serials	21	102	1	1	22	103
Telemovies	12	20	6	18	18	38
<b>Total</b>	<b>71</b>	<b>297</b>	<b>15</b>	<b>202</b>	<b>86</b>	<b>499</b>
<b>1996-97</b>						
Features	34	130	5	119	39	249
Mini-series	9	81	1	15	10	97
Series and serials	21	133	2	46	23	179
Telemovies	10	22	5	14	15	36
<b>Total</b>	<b>74</b>	<b>366</b>	<b>13</b>	<b>194</b>	<b>87</b>	<b>561</b>

Source: AFC

Note: figures may not total due to rounding

mini-series and contributed to another four titles. Three mini-series were official co-productions – *Moby Dick* with the U.K., *Kings in Grass Castles* with Ireland and *Mirror Mirror 2* with New Zealand.

Production budgets for series and serials increased by \$76 million to \$179 million largely due to two foreign productions worth \$46 million and nine Australian series worth more than \$24 million.

Telemovie production remained

stable with a slight decline from 18 titles worth \$38 million last year to 15 titles worth \$36 million in 1996-97. Despite the decline, the total was the third-highest for telemovies recorded in the past nine years. There were 10 one-off productions, two telemovie pilots for series and three titles shot as part of a telemovie series. Average budgets increased from \$2.1 million to \$2.4 million. Most of them were financed principally by the government – mainly the Commercial Tel-

evision Production Fund which contributed 62 per cent of budgets. Foreign sources increased their contribution from 12 per cent to 20 per cent and commercial broadcasters, distributors and private sources contributed 18 per cent.

Expenditure in Australia continued to grow, reaching \$410 million this year, a nine per cent increase on last year's total of \$375 million. Some \$363 million was spent on production and \$47 million on post-production services, not including spending on post-production by foreign films if no photography occurred in Australia.

Australian features increased production expenditure in Australia from \$87 million to \$115 million and TV drama expenditure from \$197 million to \$215 million.

NSW experienced the greatest increase in spending within its state boundaries, 40 per cent or \$164 million, a 50 per cent increase compared to 1995-96. Victoria was next with \$122 million (30 per cent), also an increase but Queensland dropped back to \$107 million from last year's record high of \$132 million. Production in South Australia, Tasmania and the Northern Territory increased relative to 1995-96.

There was a fall in the amount of production raised solely by overseas-based companies with more TV drama shot as co-production and less foreign features shot in Australia than in previous years. NSW companies increased the value of their production activity from \$141 million last year to \$222 million in 1996-97. The value of production from Queensland companies grew from \$56 million to \$11 million, due to productions or co-productions from Village Roadshow Pictures.

**Karen Winton**