

ADELAIDE FILM FESTIVAL

23 July, 2015

Hon Jay Weatherill MP
Premier of South Australia
State Administration Centre
200 Victoria Square
Adelaide SA 5000

Dear Premier,

Re: South Australian Board & Committee Reform

28 JUL 2014

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Thank you for your letter regarding SA Boards and Committees Reform. We welcome the opportunity to articulate the benefits of the current structure of the Adelaide Film Festival (AFF), which in its short eleven year existence has garnered an unprecedented reputation with the local community, industry and the international screen market.

The Adelaide Film Festival has been able to garner a stellar international and local reputation over its relatively short tenure largely due to the Artistic Director's passion, commitment and curatorial boldness; the expertise of the Board; the event's autonomy and the unique element of the Investment Fund.

Curated Content

The very nature of a curated program means that on occasions works will be presented that are provocative and controversial. This is a necessary and intrinsic element of an event that is intended to showcase works at the forefront of their craft. An independent AFF, with a supervisory Board, means that curatorial risks can be analysed and contextualised for audiences and government.

The current structure helps to isolate issues that may become an embarrassment for government. It is often an internal trigger around a Board meeting that the alarm is raised to discuss the issue with the Minister and to set in motion briefings for a public response.

Sponsorship and Specialist Skills

The Board is made up of the highest calibre screen and industry professionals with specialist knowledge of film investment, market positioning, event management and sponsorship leads.

AFF is currently a biennial event, which poses its own challenges in attracting sponsorship (as most potential partners respect the product but need more activity for their partnership – i.e. more than every two years) Regardless of this, the Film Festival managed to attract and maintain sponsors for the 2013 event as well as deliver new partners to the Adelaide Festival of Ideas within only a short turnaround time frame. This was due to the knowledge, connections and dedication of the AFF Board.

Given financial requirements to deliver the event predominantly through the raising of sponsorship, an independent Board becomes imperative. The current Board is not only responsive to identifying many and varied funding opportunities but succeeds in doing so at arms length without creating the perception that government is in any way compromised.

In addition to providing event expertise and sponsorship leads, the AFF Board has a unique ability to evaluate creative content, scrutinize production investment budgets, assess the competence and reputation of the team charged to deliver the project and to judge the team's ability to appropriately deliver the project within its budget constraints.

A change to the structure of the Board may jeopardise the success of the Investment Fund. The Investment Fund not only serves to distinguish the event in the global market place but it has been fundamental to its premiere programming strategy and international reputation. Several of its investment funded films have launched at esteemed international film festivals such as Cannes, Sundance and other festivals and markets which have contributed to the branding of Adelaide as innovative and as being at the forefront of creative endeavour. Few festivals internationally have the reputation for having their finger on the pulse in the way that the AFF does!

This fund also secures major new work from Australian filmmakers, encourages partnerships with the local industry and offers South Australian communities the chance to see them for the first time.

The curatorial vision of the investment projects and its success in identifying winning projects is essential to the ongoing relevancy and impact of the AFF. The interconnection between this success and the Board's involvement in the selection of suitable projects should not be underestimated.

National Representation and International Contacts

The Board is also made up of professionals within and outside of South Australia. A national perspective has been critical to capturing and relocating production opportunities from other states to Adelaide. Board members have also served to facilitate connections between the Director of the Festival and international sales agents as well as international cultural institutions to secure highly competitive films and guests for the Festival program.

High-level expertise at no cost

It should be noted that AFF Board members are not remunerated. Further, Board administration costs are nominal and every endeavour is made to keep costs to a minimum over the two-year festival cycle. Consequently, the state has gained considerable expertise and commercial advantage at virtually no cost. Ironically an endeavour on the government's part to reduce costs by changing the administrative structure may have the unintended consequence of increasing costs by having to import and pay for that expertise.

The Structure

The structure of operating as a subsidiary of the Minister for the Arts under the *Public Corporations Act 1993*, established under the *Public Corporations (Adelaide Film Festival) Regulations 2002*, has also served the Festival well. It has contributed to the perception that the event is highly valued by its government, and that although it is a relatively new event, that it has a solid basis and ongoing status. This is unlike some of the numerous events in this sector that appear one year and are gone the next. This has provided stability, standing and much needed certainty for its local and international suppliers. It has also helped cement the Festival's international regard and credibility.

The Film Festival has managed to remain administratively agile under this structure. The nimble nature of the AFF has enabled it to conduct its business in a streamlined and efficient manner. In fact, so much so, that it was able to respond swiftly to the request and opportunity from government of taking on the administration of the Festival of Ideas. We were able to do this expeditiously, efficiently and with minimum additional financial support. The 2013 Festival of Ideas was delivered within the existing corporate structure of AFF, with the same CEO and Board governing its process and procedures, at no extra cost.

The scrutiny of the Auditor General provides both the Board and the government with an added assurance that all financial matters are in fact being conducted scrupulously and at the highest governance levels.

ADELAIDE FILM FESTIVAL

The fact that the Film Festival operates with only nominal staff in the non-Festival period means that our resources would be challenged to meet the requirements of the Company Limited by Guarantee.

Community Engagement

AFF continues to create beneficial partnerships with local communities and organisations to build audience and industry participation. These partnerships have encompassed the major South Australian institutions along North Terrace, Government agencies, Local Councils as well as key regional cultural centres through special programs, guests (including artists, thinkers, filmmakers) and activities within and without the festival period. We create initiatives and opportunities for community engagement beyond the city centre and through development of skills and experiences for emerging South Australian creatives.

The AFF interacts with communities in a multiplicity of ways and we would be pleased to elaborate on this and discuss the innovative ways in which we are intending to expand this interaction for the 2015 program.

It is also important to note that due to the lean administration structure (or current structure) of both festivals, liaison with industry, audience and communities enables AFF to make swift, considered and transparent decisions that take advantage of local and national opportunities.

The current structure serves another ancillary benefit, which is almost invisible but the value of which should not be understated. We have an arts community that is not particularly conversant with the issues, requirements and priorities of government and yet it interfaces with government continuously, in a multiplicity of ways. So Board structures have become a helpful vehicle to better inform the creative community about the interface with government and its requirements. This has certainly been the case of for the AFF.

We strongly recommend that the autonomy of the AFF Board be maintained and that any proposed change to the current structure consider the impact of this to the AFF's operating costs, efficiencies, delivery, reputation and sustainability.

The Film Festival is currently a most respected screen event that has harnessed strong support from the community, the industry here in South Australia and is highly valued across Australia and around the world. We do not believe that the functions of the Festival could be carried out in an alternative way. Regarding the notion of merging with another institution, we believe that the AFF has already acted on this proposition by agreeing to merge with the Festival of Ideas, integrating its Board and succeeding in delivering an event with more profile and efficiency than ever before.

We look forward to the government's response and to the prospect of continuing to contribute to the state's reputation as an innovator and to delivering an event with the highest level of governance and creative value.

Yours sincerely,



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Chair
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CC: Hon Jack Snelling, Minister for Arts
Ms Alex Reid, Arts SA

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Hon Jay Weatherill MP
Premier of South Australia

Ms Sandra Sdraulig AM
Chair
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226 Fullarton Road
GLENSIDE SA 5065

Dear Ms Sdraulig

Thank you for your letter of 23 July 2014 to the Premier of South Australia, the Hon Jay Weatherill MP, about South Australian Boards and Committees Reform.

Your letter has been sent to the Minister for the Arts, the Hon Jack Snelling MP, as this matter falls within his portfolio responsibility.

Should you have any queries about your letter, please contact the Minister's office on telephone 8463 6270.

Yours sincerely

**Premier's Correspondence Unit
Office of the Premier**

28 July 2014

cc: Office of the Hon Jack Snelling MP, Minister for the Arts