



WHAT'S THE NEWS? ISSUE 19

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FRIENDS OF THE NATIONAL FILM AND SOUND ARCHIVE INC
Founding Patrons: Gil Brealy, Bryan Brown, Anthony Buckley, Scott Hicks,
Patricia Lovell, Chris Noonan, Michael Pate, Fred Schepisi, Albie Thoms

***Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful committed citizens can change the world.
Indeed, it is the only thing that ever has. Margaret Mead***

DEMERGER OF THE NATIONAL FILM AND SOUND ARCHIVE FROM THE AUSTRALIAN FILM COMMISSION

1 The new Labor government published its stance on the NFSA in its policy document *New Directions for the Arts*, launched in September. The specific reference reads: 'Labor will legislate to make the National Film and Sound Archive a statutory authority, following the demerger of this institution from the Australian Film Commission'. This is on page 5 of the document, which can be downloaded from http://www.alp.org.au/download/now/new_directions_for_the_arts.pdf The creation of the NFSA as a new genuinely independent cultural institution will mark a vital, exciting and progressive step in Australia's cultural history. Nothing, however, has been said about timing, nor does the Labor Party statement take into account the Screen Australia bill, of which an exposure draft exists, and which has not yet been introduced into Parliament.

2 The intention of the previous government was that the NFSA, in its current status as a division of the AFC, would become part of Screen Australia. Apart from some cosmetic changes the draft bill does nothing to recognise the nature of the NFSA as an institution (as distinct from a 'collection') and does not change the status quo. We do not know whether the new government will proceed with the Screen Australia bill in some form, which anticipates the union of the AFC, FFC and Film Australia coming into effect on 1 July 2008. Our assumption is that it will, and further, that industry pressures will encourage it to stick to this timetable, even if it introduces the bill in an altered form.

PROCESS

3 Given that assumption, it would be logical for the NFSA to be demerged from the AFC *before* Screen Australia opens for business on 1 July. For this to be achieved, the appropriate course would be for a National Film and Sound Archive bill to be introduced *in parallel* with the Screen Australia bill, to also come into effect on 1 July. The NFSA bill would provide for the NFSA to be established as a statutory authority, define its mandate and its governance structure. There would be transitional provisions concerning the transfer of assets and staff from the AFC. This is *not* complicated legislation and it would follow the same pattern as other collecting institutions like the National Museum and the National Library. It is understood that work on drafting

the NFSA bill has commenced somewhere within the new Department of the Environment, Water, Heritage and the Arts (the successor, for our concerns, of DCITA).

4 The AFC has been preparing for this eventuality. On 27 November, its acting CEO, Chris Fitchett, briefed the members of the current NFSA Advisory Committee on how they are going about this. I cannot go into detail, but I do need to point out a salient fact. Members of the Advisory Committee are appointed by the AFC and the Committee is chaired by the AFC employee (the Director of the NFSA) whom it advises. The Committee can *only* give advice, indirectly, to the AFC, and it has no ability at all to advise the Minister. This means that it is the AFC itself which is in the prime position to advise the Minister about how it splits itself into two pieces and about what those pieces comprise. At the same time, it follows that the more it passes over to the NFSA, the more the AFC *reduces* its bargaining power in its current negotiations with FFC and FA about the structure of Screen Australia.

5 The new Minister for the Environment, Water, Heritage and the Arts is Peter Garrett, and he is in the Cabinet. The former Department of Communications, Information Technology and the Arts (DCITA) is being dismantled to accommodate the new allocation of portfolios. At this point we do not know who the relevant Departmental Secretary will be.

6 Without imputing any lack of goodwill to anyone involved in these changes and negotiations, it is obvious that the dynamic of the situation puts the NFSA at a serious disadvantage. It no longer has its independently chaired, ministerially appointed Advisory Council to protect its interests and communicate directly with the new Minister. It lost this with the AFC merger in 2003. Its most senior negotiator (the NFSA Director) is a subordinate of the AFC's Chief Executive. It is an unequal situation and potentially allows the AFC a determining role in defining the future shape of the NFSA.

WHAT THE FRIENDS SHOULD NOW DO

7 The Friends, and perhaps other interested groups including the Archive Forum, need to even the balance and compensate for the absence of the former NFSA Council. In tandem with the Archive Forum, the Friends has decided to put together a joint briefing package for Peter Garrett, and to seek a meeting with him as soon as possible. The purposes of the meeting would be to:

- establish what the Minister intends to do, and against what timetable
- establish what relevant mechanisms have been set up within the Department to handle the process
- establish the likely course of the bill within Parliament. For example, will it be referred to a Senate committee for study and to gather evidence
- propose a mechanism whereby the Forum and the Friends could offer their knowledge and expertise through an effective voice in the Departmental process, especially in relation to the drafting of the legislation and the division of assets and functions.

8 We would also like to propose that now would be the ideal time to get legislation enacted to deal with Statutory Deposit in the audio-visual area. A Discussion Paper on this subject was released by the AG's Department during the 'caretaker' period and action should now be progressed under the new government. It would be ideal for the NFSA to know exactly what its role and responsibilities will be vis-à-vis statutory deposit requirements right from the outset of its creation and of course this has serious implications for its resourcing.

(This editorial is based, with thanks, on a briefing paper prepared by the Chair of the Archive Forum, Chris Puplick)

ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING OF THE FRIENDS OF THE NATIONAL FILM AND SOUND ARCHIVE INC.

Please join us
at 12.30 pm
on Friday 8 February at 12.30
at the National Film and Sound Archive
McCoy Circuit, ACTON

Looking forward to seeing you all there.

UNESCO MEMORY OF THE WORLD INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE

UNESCO's *Memory of the World* international conference will be hosted by the National Library in February 2008. This prestigious conference is open to all who wish to register and attend. The NFSA will be presenting the surviving footage from *The Story of the Kelly Gang*, which recently gained listing on the International Memory of the World register as the world's first feature film – and that is a big deal!

For more information, check the conference website <http://www.amw.org.au/mow2008/mow2008.htm>

And the Memory of the World website

http://portal.unesco.org/ci/en/ev.php-url_id=21661&url_do=do_topic&url_section=201.html

ABOUT THE FRIENDS

The Friends is a group of advocates, working to further the aims of the Archive and to encourage links between the Archive, the film and sound communities and the general community. In essence, the Friends want to promote excellence in film and sound culture, including: best practice in preservation, public programs and access; promoting high level appreciation of film and sound heritage and contemporary culture; creativity in the use of our Archive; and a broad, outward looking focus that locates Australia in the South East Asia-Pacific region and globally.

To achieve our ends, we rely on Friends to contribute energy and enthusiasm, and to participate in events that will provide the resources. You can never have too many friends. Please encourage your friends and colleagues to join us. And if you feel you would like to contribute by joining our committee, don't hesitate to contact us.

We hope you have enjoyed this newsletter and we would love to hear from you on any Friends topic. You can contact us at info@archivefriends.org or ring us on 6248 0851.

There are many ways that you can help:

☐ Helping with the newsletter ☐ Becoming a committee member ☐ Word processing or database work ☐ Writing letters ☐ Helping to photocopy and collate documents ☐ Signing up your family members and friends as new Friends ☐ Helping with fundraising ☐ Attending rallies ☐ Working on a stall ☐ Attending events. Please don't hesitate to put up your hand for any of these activities by emailing us at info@archivefriends.org All offers of assistance will be greatly appreciated.

WITH BEST WISHES FROM YOUR COMMITTEE,

Shelley Clarke, Adrian Cunningham, Ray Edmondson, Andy Hayllar, Chris Harrison, Peter Hislop, Fred Mitchell, Andrew Pike, Cheryl Stevenson and Simon Weaving.

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